

# DIPLOMACY BY CONFERENCE



The author, in the Cabinet room at 2 Whitehall Gardens  
*From the painting by Robert Olivier*

# DIPLOMACY BY CONFERENCE

*Studies in Public Affairs*  
1920-1946

BY THE RT. HON.

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## FOREWORD

DURING thirty years or more of official life in and around Whitehall, current questions of ever-increasing complexity and urgency crowded into my rather extensive orbit in such volume as to leave little time for constructive thought on the larger issues. Very early, therefore, I formed the habit of using such intervals of leisure as offered—a short holiday, a lull in the pressure, or a free week-end—to try and restore my perspective by an examination of some major issue in a detached and philosophical spirit, and nearly always on a background of history.

The results of these studies took many different forms—a letter to some friend versed in the question, a mere entry in my diary, or more often a Memorandum, which might be sent privately to a few friends but was rarely given an official status. The material thus collected was invaluable for the confidential lectures I gave every year to Service Staff Colleges and the Imperial Defence College, and occasionally in public at universities or learned societies. Some of this material is now presented in the present book.

Chapter I is based on the first lecture to be delivered at the British (now the Royal) Institute of International Affairs in November 1920 under the chairmanship of Mr Balfour. Fresh from the Paris Peace Conference I chose as my subject Diplomacy by Conference. The text of this was printed later in *The Round Table*.

The next chapter is a study of the evolution of the British machinery of government on the high level of the Privy Council, the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence. It formed the subject of the Eleventh Haldane Memorial lecture which I gave in 1942, Lord Simon being in the chair. One interesting feature is the account of the dramatic discovery by the late Sir John Fortescue of the papers of King George III and George IV, which were found to contain *inter alia* a great number of Cabinet Minutes furnished to the Monarch during those two reigns. That

discovery finally disposed of the contention that from time immemorial the keeping of Cabinet Minutes had been forbidden, which had been a "bull point" in the controversy that arose in the early 'twenties after Mr Lloyd George had continued the Secretariat of the War Cabinet of 1916-19 into the peace-time Cabinet.

That controversy, although now dead and buried, is of some constitutional interest, and is discussed in historical perspective in Chapter III. After prolonged research in the biographies of earlier days and in Hansard, the material on which the chapter is based was finally put together in 1922—that is to say, three years before I was aware of the existence of the papers of King George III and George IV. The original intention was to publish it when convenient, but the occasion never arose, and it now appears in print for the first time.

Under the Cabinet, the Committee of Imperial Defence, of which the Prime Minister has been the invariable President, is the most important co-ordinating authority. Chapter IV contains one of the fullest accounts that have been published of its genesis and subsequent development up to the year 1927, by which time the main features of the organisation had been established. I recall with special pleasure that the lecture at the University of London on which this chapter is based was also delivered under the chairmanship of Lord Balfour, the founder of the Committee twenty-three years before.

There were, of course, important embellishments of the Committee between 1927 and 1939, but they did not alter the main structure as described in this chapter, which first appeared in the *Army Quarterly*.

The work of the Committee of Imperial Defence in defensive preparation was gravely handicapped between the wars by the disarmament propaganda and policy. As early as 1925 I was profoundly disturbed at the trend of events, and after a long course of private study I compiled the material, hitherto unpublished, which forms the basis of Chapter V, during a holiday at St. Davids

in August of that year. It was sent privately to a few friends in high places, who were impressed, but the disarmament movement was already beyond control.

Disarmament is intimately connected with Collective Security, which depends on the existence of International Forces. Consequently that question is dealt with next in Chapter VI. This material was used for a lecture to the Cambridge University Society of International Affairs in 1944, but it has not, so far as I am aware, been published.

These studies of public affairs would be very incomplete without some account of the important developments in inter-Imperial Relations that have taken place during the period covered. The subject is dealt with in two chapters. Chapter VII, on the Dominions and the War, is based partly on a broadcast and partly on a lecture at Oxford, which was later printed in *The Nineteenth Century and After*. Chapter VIII, on The Empire and the Future, although based on a speech at a luncheon of the Constitutional Research Association in 1944, has hitherto remained unpublished, and both chapters have been brought up to date.

In the last chapter the wheel has turned the full circle and we get back to our starting-point at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, where, on the 11th October 1945, I returned to give a talk on the Control of External Affairs. This lecture was given under the chairmanship of Lord Perth and was reported in the *Journal* of the Institute.

As in 1920, so in 1946, we are again in an era of peace-making, but on an even larger scale. At the time of writing, the whole of the national and international machinery of Diplomacy by Conference has been geared to the task in five great cities at once :

In London, a key point in many of the great issues of the day, where the Prime Ministers of the British Commonwealth of the Nations, like their predecessors some twenty-eight years ago, are actively concerting the aims of their respective Governments ;

In *Delhi*, where members of the British Government, in concert with the Indian leaders, are making yet another attempt to solve the racial and constitutional problems of India ;

In *Cairo*, where the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty is under review by the two Governments concerned on the highest level ;

In *Paris*, where the Foreign Ministers of the United States of America, Great Britain, Soviet Russia and France have broached the problems of the European Peace Treaties ;

In *New York*, wisely chosen as the seat of the United Nations Organisation, where the Security Council and other organisations have their hands full with the aftermath of the world war.

What stage will be reached in these widespread activities by the time these words are published, none can foretell, and nothing must be said that could add to the difficulties of the negotiators. But if these studies help the public to appreciate the overwhelming difficulties of Diplomacy by Conference, and serve in some degree to avert the captious criticisms that beset the peace-makers a generation ago, something will have been gained.

If success should be slow in coming, if there are set-backs or even breakdowns, we must not be disheartened. We must remember that we are tackling problems that have baffled mankind throughout the ages.

The nations of the British Commonwealth, keeping in step with the United States of America, all inspired by faith, hope and charity, the basic principles of Christianity, provided they maintain their unity and strength, can face the future with confidence until the day comes—and may it be soon—when the problems of World Organisation can be solved.

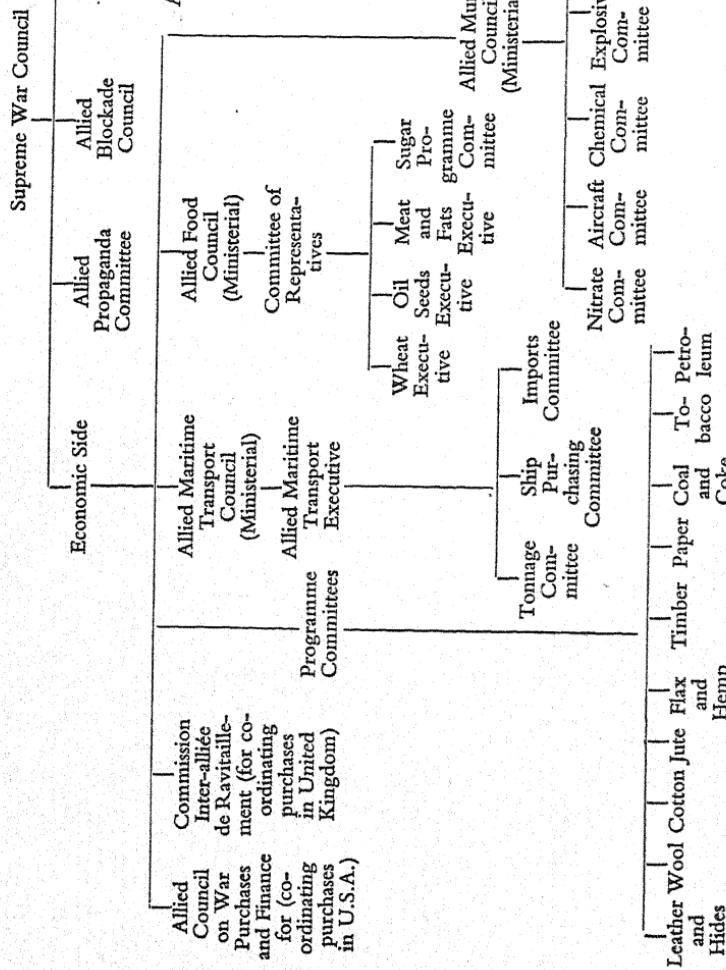
HANKEY.

26th April 1946.

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INTER-ALLIED WAR ORGANISATION, NOVEMBER 1918.



NOTE.—The organisation shown here is approximate only. It was in a state of continuous development. There were many links between the various executives which cannot be shown in diagrammatic form.

## CHAPTER I

### DIPLOMACY BY CONFERENCE

#### I

IN earlier days, when I had more leisure, I used to play a good deal of cricket, occupying the post of wicket-keeper. I have often thought there is much resemblance between the position of wicket-keeper and that of Secretary. Mistakes by either are apt to prove costly ; both have to be prepared for hard knocks, and both see a good deal of the game. My credentials for writing on this important subject are that I have seen a great deal of the game. While my personal experience of conducting diplomacy in the old sense is limited, I suppose I have had an almost unique experience of conferences, having attended nearly five hundred international meetings since 1914.

Developments of diplomacy by conference during the years immediately before 1914 need only be touched on very lightly. Useful work was accomplished by Hague Conferences, and by technical conferences on such subjects as Motor Car Legislation, Aerial Navigation, Sugar Bounties, Red Cross Organisation, Quarantine, etc. These resulted in some valuable international organisations such as The Hague Tribunal, the Postal Telegraph and Wireless Bureau at Berne and the Agricultural Bureau at Rome. From time to time also there were conferences of ambassadors held in London or elsewhere, which dealt with matters of international policy in the Balkans. In this direction Sir Edward Grey was a pioneer in diplomacy by conference. In addition, sovereigns and heads of States in their visits of ceremony were often accompanied by their Foreign Ministers, and these opportunities were taken to hold important diplomatic conversations. Occasionally individual Ministers would pay a visit to a foreign country to discuss questions of policy. There was, for example,

Lord Haldane's visit to Berlin, which is described in his book *Before the War*.

It is true that in the more distant past some of the great turning-points of foreign policy have been reached at great conferences such as those of Vienna, Paris or Berlin, which were attended by heads of Governments. In the years immediately preceding the war of 1914, however, the method of conducting international business by direct conference between the principal Ministers concerned was the exception rather than the rule. International Conferences such as those at The Hague were not attended by statesmen of the first rank. If a difficult question arose it was unusual for the responsible Ministers from the countries concerned to meet and discuss the matter face to face. The almost invariable practice was to deal through intermediaries—skilled, tactful, and experienced intermediaries, but not those persons on whom the ultimate responsibility rested.

It was the war of 1914-18 which brought about the method of direct and frequent consultation between the principal Ministers concerned, which continues to-day not only between the principal Powers, but to an equal degree between the smaller States, and more especially between those that formed the habit during that war. Properly speaking, therefore, our theme begins in 1914.

Nevertheless I should like to go back to one development which preceded the 1914-18 war, namely, that of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Strictly speaking, it does not belong to the subject of diplomacy by conference, since the Committee never had any part in our relations with foreign nations. However, the constitution of the Committee was so sound in theory, and worked out so well in practice, that British Cabinet Ministers and officials, approaching the difficulties of co-ordination between nations in time of war, even though possibly unconsciously, were influenced by it.

The Committee of Imperial Defence was established by Mr Balfour in its present form with a permanent secretariat in 1904 in

accordance with the recommendations of Lord Esher's War Office Reconstitution Committee. It consisted then, as now, of the Prime Minister and any other person whom he chose to invite to attend its meetings, and in practice these persons always included the Heads of the Departments concerned in the subjects on the agenda paper. The Committee is not an executive body, but consultative. It does not deal with matters that are strictly departmental, but is a co-ordinating body for inter-departmental matters relative to defence. The Secretariat provides an organising centre and permanent facilities for conference and record. So long as these principles have been observed ; so long as the purely advisory character of the Committee has been maintained, and so long as care has been taken not to interfere with the responsibilities of departments, the Committee has proved, as Mr Asquith, quoting Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, said in 1912, "a useful and indeed an invaluable addition to our constitutional machinery."

So successful did the Committee prove in the departmental sphere that, during the Imperial Conference of 1911, Mr Asquith decided to invite the self-governing Dominions to associate themselves actively in its work. "Call us to your councils," Sir Wilfrid Laurier had cried, and his voice had echoed back from the farthest corners of the Empire. Seven years before, Mr Balfour, in explaining to the House of Commons the functions of the new Committee, had spoken as follows :

... and I venture to go further, and to repeat what I have said before—namely, that as time goes on, our Colonies will share our discussions on those aspects of Imperial Defence in which they are specially concerned. I do not venture, indeed, to prophesy what colonial developments may result from the creation of this Committee, but I cannot doubt that we have already been enabled to lay foundations on which a noble building may yet be erected.

At the historic series of meetings begun on 26th May 1911, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was answered, and Mr Balfour's prophetic words were realised. Every aspect of our foreign policy was discussed, and a notable scheme of co-operation in Imperial defence was

inaugurated. No one who was present could doubt that these meetings exercised a great influence on the unparalleled display of unity within the British Commonwealth of Nations which astonished the world when the war broke out in August 1914.

One cannot use the word "diplomacy" in speaking of the relations within the family circle of the British Empire. It is sufficient to record the fact that the method of conference suggested by the Esher Committee and adopted by Mr Balfour in 1904, with good results in the departmental sphere, proved efficacious when applied on Mr Asquith's invitation between the Governments constituting the British Commonwealth of Nations from 1911 onwards.

It would be fascinating to follow the war development of the system first by Mr Asquith into a War Committee, and later by Mr Lloyd George into a War Cabinet (which practically brought to an end what used to be called the war on the Downing Street front), and through the Imperial War Cabinet to its latest adaptation, namely the splendidly successful British Empire Delegation at the Peace Conference in 1919. The next step, however, must be to show how the same principles were applied *mutatis mutandis* in the development of international intercourse to meet the perils and the overwhelming pressure of war business.

Very early in the war of 1914-18 it was found necessary to supplement the ordinary diplomatic means of communication between Great Britain and France. M. Millerand's visit to London early in 1915, and Mr Asquith's meeting with M. Millerand, General Joffre and General Foch at Lord French's General Headquarters in June 1915, will be recalled. In the financial sphere Mr Lloyd George, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, at a very early stage got into personal contact with the French Minister of Finance, and, when he became Minister of Munitions, with

M. Albert Thomas. The British and French navies and armies also, at the outset, established elaborate systems of liaison. The fact was that from the first the problems presenting themselves to the Allies were too numerous, too varied, too technical and too urgent to be dealt with solely through the normal diplomatic channels.

Although technical conferences were held much earlier, including an important Conference of Finance Ministers summoned by Mr Lloyd George in February 1915, the first meeting of the heads of Governments did not take place until 6th July 1915, when Mr Asquith, accompanied by Mr Balfour, Lord Kitchener and Lord Crewe, met at Calais M. Viviani, the French Prime Minister, M. Delcassé, M. Augagneur, M. Millerand and M. Albert Thomas. This departure was resorted to by the two Governments owing to the overwhelming difficulty of concerting their policy, through the ordinary diplomatic channels, when so many factors entered into the situation. Even at that early stage, before the methods of diplomacy by conference had taken shape, good results were achieved, and in a single day's conference more was accomplished to bring about unity of policy than could have been effected in weeks of inter-communication by ordinary diplomatic methods. This meeting, which was followed by others, was really the first step in the development of diplomacy by conference, which, later on, became so important a factor in the victory of the Allies.

The first attempt to provide any definite form and organisation for the Conferences was initiated at an important meeting held in Paris on 17th November 1915. There it was decided in principle to set up permanent machinery for co-ordinating the efforts of the Allies in the war, and Mr Asquith undertook to make proposals. Lord Kitchener had for some time been anxious for something of the kind, in fact, at the War Council, as early as January 1915, he had suggested the idea which culminated later in the formation of the Supreme War Council. An informal interchange of views took place between the two Governments through the medium of

liaison officers, and on 19th January 1916, at a further conference between Mr Asquith and M. Briand at 10 Downing Street, rules for the establishment of an Allied Committee were approved and initialled by the two Prime Ministers. The Committee was to be advisory in character, and its conclusions were subject to the approval of the Governments concerned. Its composition was to be as elastic as possible. It consisted of the Prime Ministers of any of the Allies and of such members of the Governments and staffs as were required for the discussion of the subjects brought before it.

Whenever possible, the meetings were to be preceded by an interchange of views between the naval and military and other departments of the interested countries. Conclusions were to be formulated after each meeting. Each Government was to nominate a Secretary Liaison Officer, whose function was to act as joint Secretary and to ensure permanent contact between the respective Governments. Except for the fact that Mr Asquith had proposed a permanent secretariat, the foregoing scheme approximated closely to the draft suggested by the British Government, which was deliberately an adaptation of the machinery of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

The new plan was applied for the first time at a great Conference opened at Paris on 26th March 1916, at which the Prime Ministers not only of Great Britain and France, but also of Italy, Belgium and Serbia (with representatives of Japan, Russia and Portugal), were present. The meeting of the heads of Governments was preceded by a meeting of the General Staffs of the Allied Armies, whose report was read by General Joffre and approved by the Conference, which also dealt with questions of blockade and shipping. The reference of all important questions to conferences between the heads of the Governments concerned now became an established practice, and regular meetings took place during 1916.

One cannot leave this period without referring to the death of Lord Kitchener on his way to Russia—a martyr to diplomacy by conference. Mr Lloyd George was to have accompanied Lord

Kitchener, but was prevented by affairs in Ireland, where, after the Dublin outbreak, he had been asked to try to effect a settlement.

Even the cross-Channel passages involved in these war conferences were not free from a certain element of risk. One night, owing to a misunderstanding about a signal at Calais, the destroyer containing Mr Asquith and half his Cabinet was kept waiting so long that it drifted into a position from which it had to pass right through a newly laid German minefield. Another time a hospital ship we had used as a gangway to reach the shore at Boulogne was sunk an hour or two later on the very same course—an unusual one from Dover to Boulogne. On one occasion Calais was bombarded and the Straits raided by destroyers from Zeebrugge and Ostend at the precise moment when, according to programme, we should have been sailing. As it happened, however, Mr Lloyd George had at the last moment decided to break the journey at Abbeville.

I recall one exceptionally painful crossing. At the end someone remarked that at least we had escaped the German mines, on which Mr Balfour chimed in : “A mine was the one thing I was praying for.”

The reasons for which Lord Kitchener’s tragic journey had been undertaken remained no less insistent after his death. Russia’s huge demands on the resources of the Western Allies for munitions and finance rendered it urgently necessary to send some emissary of the highest rank to that country to arrange for the co-ordination of effort between east and west. Once more the Allies were faced with the fact that the ordinary methods of international intercourse, even though supplemented by an elaborate system of technical liaison, were inadequate. Once more it was found imperatively necessary to establish direct contact between responsible heads of Governments.

At a conference between the British, French, Italian and Russian Governments at Paris on 15th November 1916, at which the British Government was represented by Mr Asquith and Mr Lloyd George, it was agreed that Great Britain, France and Italy should take part

in a political and military conference in Russia, and each Government undertook to nominate representative statesmen and soldiers of the first rank, capable of speaking with authority. So much importance was attached to this mission that Mr Lloyd George, undeterred by his escape from sharing Lord Kitchener's fate, offered to go to Russia as head of the British Section of the Mission. Events supervened, however, which put this out of the question for three weeks later Mr Lloyd George became Prime Minister.

## 3

Mr Lloyd George had always been an enthusiastic advocate of the principle of diplomacy by conference. As early as March 1915, with a view to a solution of the Balkan problem he had advanced a proposal for holding a great conference at some place in the Near East, such as Lemnos, which could be reached by the British, French, Russian and Serbian Foreign Ministers in three or four days, and to which even the neutral Balkan States might be induced to send representatives. It is an interesting speculation whether the whole course of the war might not have been changed if it had been possible to carry out this proposal. As might have been expected, therefore, when Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister an immense impetus was given to the practice of diplomacy by conference. The summoning of the Prime Ministers of the Dominions and the representatives of India to meet in an Imperial War Cabinet was the first act of his Government, and has already been cited as an application of the principle to Imperial politics.

At Christmas 1916, that is to say within just over a fortnight of the formation of the new Government, a useful conference took place between the British and French Governments, at which, among other things, the Allied reply to the German Peace Note was drafted. A few days after its conclusion the Prime Minister, accompanied by Lord Milner, Sir William Robertson, Sir Henry Wilson and myself, started for Rome. The journey to Rome with

M. Briand, M. Thomas and General Lyautey, was one incessant conference, lasting late into the nights. From a secretarial point of view I can testify that a super-heated railway carriage in a train going at express speed is not an ideal conference chamber !

The Rome Conference was the most fruitful which had yet taken place. General Cadorna had left his headquarters to attend the meetings. Sir Francis Elliot had come specially from Athens. General Sarrail and General Milne had been summoned from Salonika, and there was a great assemblage of naval, military and diplomatic experts. The conference was at first much too large for the transaction of any real business, and secrecy was impossible to secure. Before long, therefore, the principals adjourned to an inner room at the Consulta, where the formality which had been creeping over the recent larger conferences was cast aside, and the discussions took place in an atmosphere of intimacy and the greatest good humour.

The first resolution was in favour of closer co-operation in the future than in the past, with more frequent conferences. The second related to the forthcoming conference in Russia. A third recommended the development of a new line of communications with Macedonia through Italy, thus shortening the sea communications, which were so seriously beset by submarines. In addition, a new line of land communication was to be developed from Santi Quaranta to Monastir. General Sarrail's policy towards Greece was laid down, and his relations towards the General Officers Commanding the other Allied Armies in the Balkans were definitely regulated.

Naturally, the Italian front came up for consideration both from an offensive and defensive point of view. Mr Lloyd George, in a memorandum he circulated at this conference, laid the utmost stress on the preparation of an Allied plan, that is to say, something more than an isolated Italian plan for providing against an enemy concentration on the Italian front. He urged that this front would be liable to a concentrated attack in the event of a collapse of the

Russian front, an eventuality which he already insisted must be faced. It was largely due to his persistency that plans were prepared in advance to facilitate the rapid transportation of British and French divisions to the Italian front ten months later after the disaster at Caporetto. How many Allied soldiers and sailors owe their lives to the development of the short sea route to the Balkans it is difficult to estimate. What is certain is that the decisions of this conference contributed in no small degree both to the Italian recovery after Caporetto and to the final offensive in the Balkans in the autumn of 1918, which was the beginning of the end. By no other means than conference could decisions involving so many naval, military, political and technical transport considerations have been settled in so short a time as three days.

Almost immediately after this conference the Allied Mission, of which Lord Milner and Sir Henry Wilson were the principal British members, sailed for Russia, and held there a series of conferences during February, covering a prodigious amount of ground. The revolution broke out shortly after its departure from Russia, and the high hopes of real co-operation between east and west which had been based on this essay in diplomacy by conference were never realised. Thereafter events moved too fast in Russia for diplomacy, whether of the old or the new type, to be of avail, and neither Mr Arthur Henderson nor M. Albert Thomas in their subsequent missions was able to galvanise Russia into becoming an effective ally.

In the United States of America, however, the system of diplomacy by conference was applied in 1917 with the most useful results. In April Mr Balfour, who was then Foreign Secretary, left on a special mission to Washington, where he not only did much to assist our new Allies to organise their gigantic strength, but left an enduring mark on the relations between the two countries.

Among other notable War Missions to the United States were those of Lord Northcliffe and Lord Reading. The latter's four

missions to America would almost require a chapter in a full history of diplomacy by conference.

During the first ten months of 1917 there were no fewer than eleven conferences, apart from the conferences in Russia and America. They were held wherever was most convenient—in London, Paris, Calais, Boulogne, St. Jean de Maurienne. They dealt with matters of great importance, including the spring and summer offensives in 1917; the length of front to be held by the British and French armies; the railway situation; Turkey, Asia Minor and the Balkans. One notable result was the deposition of King Constantine and the subsequent equipment of the Greek Army.

One of the most interesting, in the light of subsequent events, was a conference (14th-15th October 1917)—almost an informal one—held at Chequers, at a week-end party given by Lord and Lady Lee to celebrate the acceptance by the Government of their munificent offer of this beautiful property as the future residence of Prime Ministers. In the memorandum of his gift Lord Lee speaks of “the beneficial effect that the climate and atmosphere of Chequers invariably exercise upon hardworking men of affairs.”

Among the guests were Mr Lloyd George, Mr Balfour, General Smuts, M. Painlevé, the French Foreign Minister, M. Franklin Bouillon and General Foch. Mr Lloyd George seized the opportunity to open up a proposal he had been maturing with his colleagues, namely, that the meetings between the heads of Governments should be supplemented by the establishment of a permanent staff of military officers whose sole function would be to study the war as a whole, and to give the heads of the several Governments their views as to the strategy which should be adopted. He pointed out that the defect of the system hitherto pursued had been that each general was interested mainly in his own front. Consequently, when the Commanders-in-Chief and leading military authorities of the Allies met in conference, they did not draw up a plan in which the war was treated as a whole, but they each

approved each other's plans and arranged for a certain amount of coincidence in point of time. In the picturesque phrase he used a month later in his stirring speech in Paris, the generals merely stitched their plans together—and "stitching is not strategy." This, however, was not a real co-operation such as was needed to ensure victory. The occasion was not one at which executive decisions could be taken—more particularly as M. Painlevé had had to return to France before the theme had been fully developed—but Mr Lloyd George's idea took root.

The opportunity for putting it in operation was not long in coming. Less than a fortnight later, came the news of the disaster sustained by the Italian Army at Caporetto. Mr Lloyd George did not hesitate a moment. In company with General Smuts, Sir William Robertson, Sir Henry Wilson and myself, he started at once for Italy, and was joined in Paris by M. Painlevé, M. Franklin Bouillon and General Foch. At Rapallo they were met by M. Orlando, Baron Sonnino, and representatives of the Italian High Command. The plans initiated as the result of the Rome Conference had already been put in operation and further measures were concerted for bringing Allied assistance to Italy. Before we left Italy we were reassured by the appearance of trainloads of stalwarts in khaki and blue.

Even more important, however, than the assistance to Italy was the decision at Rapallo to establish the Supreme War Council. In this further development of diplomacy by conference the analogy of our Committee of Imperial Defence was once more closely followed. The Council consisted of Prime Ministers and one colleague apiece, selected according to the subject of discussion. That is to say, the permanent nucleus consisted of Prime Ministers only. It was advisory and prepared recommendations for the decision of the Governments. The constitutional authority of the

Governments and the responsibility of the high military commands to those Governments were carefully safeguarded. A council of Military Representatives was set up to act as technical advisers to the Supreme War Council. It was to receive all available information for its assistance. It originally consisted of Generals Foch, Sir Henry Wilson and Cadorna, and was afterwards joined by the American General Bliss. A Secretariat was attached to the Military Representatives. The British Section of this Secretariat, organised by Lt.-Col. Lancelot Storr, which was the first to be established, was a branch of our War Cabinet Secretariat, the lineal successor of the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Thus in the hour of Italy's travail and distress was born an organisation destined to exercise the greatest possible influence on the history of the world. For the remainder of the 1914-18 war, that is to say, during its culminating stages, the whole of the higher strategy and policy of the allies was concerted almost exclusively at the Supreme War Council. Among its most notable meetings there stands out in my memory one held in the stately town hall at Beauvais, shortly after the disaster of 21st March 1918, when unity of command was completed by the installation of General Foch as General-in-Chief of the Allies.

A few weeks before at Doullens, where Lord Milner had represented the British Government, he had been appointed to co-ordinate the Allied armies. In private conversation someone asked him at Beauvais "why do you want the *title* of General-in-Chief?" He replied, "*Je suis M. Foch, très bien connu, mais toujours M. Foch.*"

Apart from the Conference itself the whole day was a typical incident of diplomacy by conference in war time: the start at 7 a.m. from Folkestone in a tiny motor patrol boat, the largest craft that could be spared even for a Prime Minister at a time when everything that could float was needed for the transport of reinforcements to France: the motor car journey of 200 miles to and from Beauvais, through roads encumbered with battered and shattered

divisions coming down from, and fresh divisions marching up to, the battle for Amiens : the lads from a Scottish battalion disembarking at Boulogne on our return, looking, in the dim light of the shaded arc lamps, like schoolboys—they were the first of the boys of eighteen whom the cruel necessities of war had compelled us to send to the Front ; a few days later they were to win imperishable glory on the Messines ridge : the sullen roar of a huge bomb falling in Boulogne as our cockle-shell cleared the harbour—an apt good-night greeting from that stricken land : the cheerless arrival in London at 3 a.m. after a 20 hours' day.

Another meeting which stands out in my memory was one held shortly after in the quiet parlour of the Préfet's house at Abbeville at a time when the British and French armies seemed to be almost threatened with separation ; on this occasion General Foch stoutly and sturdily refused even to admit the possibility of our losing the Channel ports. At Abbeville also General Foch's authority was extended to the Italian front and the great decision was taken to give absolute priority to the transportation of American combatant troops and men for the railways.

Many notable resolutions were taken at Versailles including the extension of the offensive to the Turkish theatre and the Balkans and the drawing up of the Armistice terms. The decisions taken by the Supreme War Council, however, were too numerous and too varied to admit of summary. It was the most remarkable war development of the system of diplomacy by conference.

The Supreme War Council was not limited to the three Powers which met at Rapallo. Almost from the first the United States of America was represented by a diplomat, who had authority to report what occurred but not to discuss—an ear but not a mouth, M. Clemenceau called him—and later Colonel House joined the Council. Representatives of the other Allies were introduced according to the business under discussion as equals with the representatives of the larger States. At one time or another there were present representatives of many of the Allies, besides the

Prime Ministers or representatives of our own Dominions and India.

The number of officers and officials who for one reason or another claimed to be present at the Supreme War Council sometimes became too large, having regard to the essential need of secrecy in military plans. It is always a difficulty in international gatherings that, if an expert of one nation is called in for a particular question, the corresponding experts of all the other nations (whether really required or not) enter the room also. Once they have entered, it is difficult to eject them, even when their subject has been dealt with, particularly if they are Cabinet Ministers or officers or officials of high rank. Curiosity detains them. Meanwhile other subjects are raised and fresh troops come in until the room is overcrowded, and any intimacy in discussion becomes impossible. This real difficulty in all international work can only be surmounted by very firm handling. At the Supreme War Council the difficulty was met, as it had been met before at Rome and elsewhere, by the heads of Governments meeting to deal with all the more secret matters in a tiny room to which the indispensable experts were admitted only so long as their presence was required.

Apart from the Supreme War Council the inter-allied machinery for conducting diplomacy by conference had by 1918 developed very remarkably in many other directions. I have prepared a diagram to show at a glance the organisation at the time of the armistice. (It appears on page 10.) Each branch of the organisation had its own contribution to make to the history of diplomacy by conference, but I will not go into details beyond mentioning that sea-power and its application, so vital to the victory of the Allies, was exercised by the Allied Naval Council, the Allied Maritime Transport Council and the Blockade Council, all of which very properly had their headquarters in London. It is not too much to say that this organisation covered every sphere of inter-allied activity, and constituted a veritable organ of international government. The various commissions, composed of Cabinet Ministers, might be

compared with the Cabinet Ministers in a Government, and the executives working under them to Government departments. The executives had power to deal with all questions in their respective spheres, but if the matters to be dealt with were too important for the permanent representatives on the various executives, they were referred to commissions on which the Cabinet Ministers sat. If, as sometimes occurred, a question involved matters of the highest policy, it was referred to the Supreme War Council, which had become, as it were, the Cabinet of the Allies.

In the earlier part of the war someone—I think it was General Sarrail—remarked that “after all Napoleon was not so great a general—he only had to deal with coalitions.” In the early stages of the war the coalition undoubtedly involved great loss of energy. At the end, however, this was no longer true. The overwhelming pressure of circumstances, and on at least two occasions the lash of defeat, had compelled the Allies to overcome the inertia which had almost paralysed us at the earlier stages. With much creaking, and after some failures, perseverance, enthusiasm, mutual self-denial and experience had triumphed. By the last months of the war the Allies had achieved unity of command in the economic sphere no less than in the military. In the forcing house of war the governmental machinery of a veritable League of Nations had grown up, whereby the will of the allied peoples to win could be put into effect.

Such, then, was the position when the preliminary Peace Conference opened in Paris in January 1919. The machinery which had stood the terrible test of war inevitably became the nucleus of the Peace Conference. The Council of Ten, which was the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference, was merely the Supreme War Council under a different name. Sometimes, indeed, when military questions were before it, it met under the old name. It was the Supreme War Council which approved the naval, military and air

clauses of the German and Austrian Treaties on the basis of drafts submitted to it by committees of naval, military and air officers, many of whom had been associated during the war, whether on the Allied Naval Council, the Military Council at Versailles, or elsewhere. The International Secretariat of the Supreme War Council was brought up from Versailles and attached to the Secretariat-General of the Peace Conference.

In the economic sphere there was a development of the war machinery in order to meet the terrifying situation not only of Central Europe, but of half the world. On 8th February 1919, a Supreme Economic Council was created, which absorbed most of the economic organisations, and established ramifications all over Europe with a view to the improvement of the disastrous economic conditions then prevalent. In addition there were, of course, other developments to meet the exigencies of the Peace Conference itself. Expert commissions were set up to study the innumerable technical questions with which the Conference had to deal. They covered every aspect of the five great Treaties.

It is interesting to recall that for the consideration of certain questions representatives of neutral nations, Denmark, Holland, Luxembourg and Switzerland were heard by the Supreme Council or its commissions. The work of all these bodies focussed in the Supreme Council, which had to deal not only with the peace settlement itself, but also with innumerable questions of the greatest difficulty and perplexity which kept arising in every part of the world and required instant decision.

In February, events in their own countries compelled Mr Lloyd George and President Wilson to return home. They came back to Paris in March, and for a few more meetings the Council of Ten continued to function. Progress, however, was slow. The Expert Commissions only too often could not agree, and presented two or more reports. The parties concerned had to be heard again and again. The same difficulty of large numbers as had been encountered at Versailles presented itself. Really intimate discussions

became more and more difficult. Above all, a most irritating leakage commenced. The views expressed by members were repeated outside and published often in a perverted and exaggerated form. The members of the Council of Ten were pestered by interested parties to know if this or that *on dit* were true. In all this cackle and intrigue serious business was almost impossible. The transfer of the whole Conference to some quieter spot was seriously considered.

Eventually, however, the difficulty was surmounted, as it had been surmounted at home in 1917 and at Versailles in 1918, by the principals withdrawing to a small room. There and then was established the body which came to be known as the Council of Four, composed of President Wilson, Mr Lloyd George, M. Clemenceau and M. Orlando, and sometimes attended by the representative of Japan. The Council of Ten did not absolutely come to an end, but henceforward it met less often. The principal conclusions of the German Treaty were reached by the Council of Four, but a Council of Foreign Ministers took part of the work off its shoulders.

The Council of Four met usually in the private apartments of President Wilson, but occasionally in those of Mr Lloyd George or in M. Clemenceau's room at the French War Office. They would hear the various experts and then deliberate in private or with the representatives of the States concerned until they reached a decision. For over three weeks they met with only an interpreter (M. Mantoux) and without a secretary. This interval was useful as it freed them from the hordes of officials who had gradually, for one reason or another, been admitted to the Council of Ten and enabled them to block in the broad lines of the Treaty. For obvious reasons, however, it was not a system that could continue when they came down to detail. Some link between the Council and the Conference then became essential if their conclusions were to be recorded and communicated to the Drafting Committee, etc., for insertion in the Treaty and to the representatives of the nations

which were so eagerly awaiting them. Even the marshalling of their business, the assembly of the representatives of the nations concerned and of the necessary experts, and the communication of the conclusions to those who had to act on them were no light task. Consequently, in April 1919 I was admitted as Secretary, and I continued in that capacity until the final separation of the Council of Four at the end of June.

Some idea of the pressure on these four men may be gathered from the fact that the records comprise 206 meetings in 101 days (including 15 Sundays), and occupy ten large foolscap volumes of typescript. No fewer than 674 conclusions were recorded.

The proceedings of the Council of Four were quite informal and unhampered by rules or written procedure. These four men of wide and varied political experience were free to conduct the business in the best way they could discover. They were able to discuss questions in the greatest intimacy, not only among themselves but with the heads of the States concerned. They all possessed in common the invaluable gift of humour, and many a time have I seen a difficult period tided over by some sparkle of wit or the timely interpolation of a good story. In the intimacy of this small circle personal resources were available which could not be used to the same extent in a larger and more formal gathering. An atmosphere of personal friendship and mutual respect was created in which the thorniest questions, where national or other interests appeared to clash almost irreconcilably, could be adjusted.

Looking back and reviewing the proceedings, I am surprised, not at the time taken to complete the German Treaty, which was much criticised at the time, but at the astonishing rapidity with which it was accomplished.

Before leaving this phase of the Peace Conference it is important, from a British point of view, to record that the British Empire Delegation, which included the Prime Ministers of all the Dominions and the representatives of India, was in continuous session from the beginning of the Peace Conference to the signature of the German

Treaty. By this means the members of the British Delegation were in constant consultation with their colleagues from the British Dominions and India. In addition, the representatives of the Dominions and India were heard by the Council of Ten or by the Council of Four on certain questions where they had special interests and one or other of them was represented on the more important commissions of the Peace Conference, as well as on the secretariats of many of these commissions. The Secretariat of the British Empire Delegation was furnished by officials of the Dominions and India co-operating with Captain Clement Jones of the War Cabinet Secretariat. Contrary to certain statements I can assert with confidence that no important decision was taken by the Peace Conference in which the Dominions and India were not consulted.

## 6

After the German Treaty was signed, the Council of Four dispersed, but the Supreme Council continued to meet at Paris until the end of the year for the completion of the Austrian, Bulgarian and Hungarian Treaties. Mr Balfour and afterwards Sir Eyre Crowe were the British representatives. After January, however, the Supreme Council ceased to meet in permanent session. In so important a matter as the Turkish Treaty, the presence of responsible Ministers was held to be essential, and neither the British nor Italian Governments found it possible to spare Cabinet Ministers to remain in Paris. The Turkish Treaty, therefore, was elaborated in the spring of 1920 at sessions held in London and San Remo, the final touches being added in July at Spa. The Treaty was signed at Sèvres on 10th August.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Supreme Council was engaged on the work of completing the Peace Treaties up to August 1920. In the later stages, however, it had a second function to perform in acting as an organ

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres was never ratified. The Turkish settlement was made at the Treaty of Lausanne (24th July 1923).

of consultation between the Governments concerned in matters relating to the execution of those treaties of peace which had already been signed and ratified.

It is convenient to revert for a moment to the establishment of the League of Nations.

The Covenant of the League of Nations was drawn up as one of the first acts of the Peace Conference. This instrument went further than any of the international machinery created during the war. This is shown by comparing the opening words of the preamble with the corresponding passage in the constitution of the Supreme War Council. The preamble begins : "In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security *by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war*," etc., the said obligations being set forth in the body of the Covenant. The Supreme War Council, on the other hand, was established "*with a view to better co-ordination*." The Council of the League (Article V.) makes "decisions." The Supreme War Council prepared "*recommendations for the decision of the Governments*." The war organisation was merely an instrument for diplomacy by conference based throughout on the conception of a number of States concerting their policy in common. The Covenant, though carefully safeguarding the rights and independence of States and affording opportunities for diplomacy by conference, went further and created a deciding body. The Covenant was brought automatically into operation by the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, and the first meeting of the Council of the League was held on 16th January 1920.

In forming a League of Nations, designed ultimately to embrace all the nations of the world, it was of course essential to include nations which had been neutral in the recent war. One result of this provision was that the enforcement of some parts of the Peace Treaties could not be entrusted to the new League. How, it was asked, could a League, including many States which had been neutral, be expected to enforce treaties which had been imposed by

the victors in the late war? If resort had to be made to force (as actually occurred in the occupation of Frankfort, etc.) the neutrality of these States would have been compromised. This argument was particularly pertinent in the period immediately following the war when the attitude of the ex-enemy Powers towards the Treaties was uncertain and the horrible possibility of a re-opening of the war could not be excluded. Neutral Powers would never have entered a League which might involve them, as principals, in a re-opening of the war.

Hence, the victors in the war had to make their own arrangements to supervise the execution of the Treaties of Peace. A Conference of Ambassadors was set up in Paris in January 1920 as an executive committee for the purpose. Questions which involved high policy beyond the competence of the Conference of Ambassadors were referred to the Governments who met at the Supreme Council to decide them. By far the most important of these meetings was held in Spa in July when, for the first time, German representatives came into open conference with the Allies. Neutrals in the late war had already been admitted at Paris. The introduction of an ex-enemy State to the Council within seven months of the ratification of peace suggests how the war machinery might have been developed through the Peace Conference, by a process of evolution, into a League of Nations until it comprised ex-enemy as well as ex-neutral States.

The questions raised in connection with the execution of the Peace Treaties touched the most vital interests of the nations concerned, such as the disarmament of Germany, reparations, deliveries of coal and ships, the use of Danzig to Poland and the various plebiscites. Many of them would cease to arise as the disarmament was completed and the plebiscites were brought to a conclusion. Now, in 1920, some of the Commissions for the execution of the Peace Treaty had been dissolved. For some time to come, however, problems might arise in connection with some aspects of the execution of the Peace Treaties, for example, repara-

tions and the occupation of the Rhineland. The discussions on such critically important questions, which sometimes involved the possibility of a resort to force, drew inevitably to the meetings of the Supreme Council the leading statesmen of the Allies. When they came together they naturally seized the opportunity to discuss the principal questions in which their countries were concerned. The statesmen of other countries, such as Poland, Greece, etc., clustered round these assemblages and brought forward their own problems. What happened, then, was that until a later period many of the first-class questions were by force of circumstances dealt with by the Supreme Council rather than by the League of Nations. The Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers were not able to spare time to attend meetings of the League as well as of the Supreme Council, which were a great drain on their time. Consequently, the meetings of the League, though attended by very distinguished men, had not up to November 1920 secured the presence of those who bore the highest responsibility.

Perhaps this co-existence of the Supreme Council during the infancy of the League of Nations was not a disadvantage. It had given the Council and the Secretariat-General of the League time to organise its staff, its commissions and the duties allotted by the Covenant and the Peace Treaties, and to prepare for the first meeting of the Assembly, and for the move to permanent headquarters at Geneva. It would have been difficult to make so much progress with these heavy tasks if the League had been inundated with the mass of international business arising immediately out of the war. Moreover the League had escaped the resentment which the ex-enemy Powers might have felt towards it if it had been the instrument for ensuring the more unpopular stipulations of the Peace Treaties, such as disarmament. Thus the entry of the ex-enemy States when the right moment arrived was facilitated. On a long view it may be that the Supreme Council had done the League a good turn by relieving it of the immediate and more disagreeable aftermath of the war.

Now the League was rapidly expanding its activites. The tenth session of the Council had been held at Brussels. International questions of the first importance, such as the Aaland Islands and the Polish-Lithuanian dispute, had been referred to. The League had undertaken the repatriation of the prisoners from Siberia. The International Labour Office was very active and an important financial conference had lately been held at Brussels. With the forthcoming meeting of the Assembly the new machine was running at high speed. The question had been raised whether the Supreme Council would now disappear. In any event it was doubtful whether the name would endure. It was not used at Spa in the official records except in connection with a few matters, such as the reply to the Turkish Note, where the Powers were sitting as the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference. The real question was whether this particular machinery for diplomacy by conference could be dispensed with. Or to state the question more broadly—could the Council of the League of Nations, which was a deciding body of fixed composition, replace the conferences at which particular groups of Powers met to determine a common policy on matters of common interest? The point was a controversial one on which French public opinion felt strongly. Something analogous to the Supreme Council, however, had to continue unless the League could replace the machinery whereby the States engaged in the recent war could concert their policy in regard to the execution of the Treaties of Peace.

It is worth noting that there were other tendencies towards a grouping of States independently of the League. In Eastern Europe, for example, the Little *Entente* had recently come into being; the Scandinavian group of countries had held occasional meetings to discuss matters concerning them; the newly-formed Baltic States, including Poland and Finland, had followed their example; and the different States of North, South and Central America had for years held periodical meetings to discuss matters of common interest. There appeared nothing inconsistent with

the letter or the spirit of the Covenant in the formation of these groups for the conduct of diplomacy by conference. One could even conceive that an eventual grouping of nations within the League might strengthen it by rendering possible a decentralisation of business and a more logical method of electing the Council of the League so as to represent the whole of the nations.

Perhaps the most important result of conducting diplomacy by conference is the knowledge responsible statesmen acquire of one another. The earlier conferences of the war were hampered by a certain formality and reserve. At every successive meeting, however, they became franker and more cordial. By June 1916, Mr Asquith was able in all sincerity to extend a warm welcome to M. Briand and members of the French Government as "our colleagues who, in the course of these frequent conferences, have become our friends." As the war progressed, and as the conferences became more and more frequent, the degree of intimacy became even greater. Sometimes the whole atmosphere of a conference has been improved by an informal dinner party, and I have known a knotty problem to be solved by a friendly conversation in a corner at a crowded reception. The social side, which is so important in the psychology of these gatherings, could only enjoy full play on a basis of mutual knowledge and respect and, better still, of friendship.

Lord Beaconsfield would seem to have attached importance to this. In his novel *Endymion*, written after his return from the Conference of Berlin, one of the characters is Baron Sergius, a veteran Continental statesman of wide experience, into whose mouth Lord Beaconsfield puts many wise words. Among these, the following is of interest :

"The first requisite," Baron Sergius would say, "in the successful conduct of public affairs is a personal acquaintance with the statesmen engaged.

It is possible that events may not depend now so much as they did a century ago on individual feeling, but, even if prompted by general principles, their application and management are always coloured by the idiosyncrasy of the chief actors. The great advantage which your Lord Rochampton, for example, has over all his colleagues in *la haute politique*, is that he was one of your plenipotentiaries at the Congress of Vienna . . . .” (Chapter VI.)

Real intimacy and friendship contribute materially to the success of diplomacy by conference by rendering possible absolute frankness in discussion. Ministers should be free to explain to their foreign colleagues, if they think fit, without fear of disclosure, all their difficulties, internal and external, public and personal. Such candour is much easier of attainment when the number of persons present is limited. Consequently, at certain stages, conferences can often best be confined to the parties principally concerned. The Council of Four very often found it convenient to meet temporarily as a Council of Three, and there were constant interchanges of views *à deux*. The presence *ex officio* of outsiders who have no particular concern in the question to be discussed is apt to be a disadvantage. It results in set speeches, in which every word has to be weighed. This, of course, does not mean that at the right moment and by mutual agreement, outsiders should not be brought in as arbitrators or mediators.

At certain stages of conferences, secrecy may be essential. It is, of course, equally essential that eventually there should be the fullest publicity. The representatives of nations at these conferences are responsible to their respective peoples, and unless these peoples are properly instructed by the fullest publicity, they will not form a true judgment of the issues. Premature publicity, however, may be fatal. In war the lives of the combatants and the success of the operations may be sacrificed thereby. Even in peace, the settlement of delicate international problems may sometimes be ruined or jeopardised by ill-timed publicity, as instanced by the failure of the Council of Ten in Paris. In these matters those who have to conduct the negotiations must have at least the same right of

secrecy as is exercised by a Cabinet, a board of directors, or the executive committee of a trade union.

The secretariat is of great importance and of great difficulty in diplomacy by conference. Each nation as a rule wants to have its own secretariat. It is, however, very difficult for several foreigners to combine to produce an identical record of a discussion unless they have ample time. At Versailles, the difficulty was surmounted very successfully. The four Secretaries (British, American, French and Italian) were a veritable band of brothers. They were all, or nearly all, bi-lingual. To show how thoroughly cosmopolitan they were, in its later stages the British Secretary's name was Major Caccia and the Italian Secretary's name was Maggiore Jones !

After every meeting they used to meet and dictate in turns the notes of the meeting, the speeches originally delivered in French being translated into English and *vice versa*. They afterwards did the recording work of the Council of Ten at the Peace Conference with the greatest distinction and success. It is, however, better to have a single secretary if one can be found who is acceptable to all. The authors of the Covenant did well to establish a single Secretary-General. A really good and discreet *précis* is preferable to stenographic notes. Apart from the difficulties of finding reliable bilingual stenographers this tends to greater freedom of discussion. My experience is that the best results are achieved if every man speaks in his own language. Very few people can really express themselves properly in a foreign language. Good interpreters, therefore, are essential. It is difficult to over-estimate the value of such men as M. Mantoux or M. Camerlynck, the interpreters to the Supreme Council, who were able to give a faithful interpretation not only of the meaning, but of the precise nuance of every phrase, and who were equally able to translate a short or long speech.

My personal experience is that the most important elements of success in diplomacy by conference are elasticity of procedure, small numbers, informality, mutual acquaintance and if possible, personal friendship among the principals, a proper perspective between

secrecy in deliberation and publicity in results, reliable secretaries and interpreters. The more delicate the subjects, the more essential are these conditions.

It can hardly be doubted that diplomacy by conference has come to stay. It can, of course, be urged that a system which was necessary to meet the tremendous pressure of war business is no longer required in quieter times, and that it would be better to revert to the old system of diplomacy, born in times when distances were great and movement slow and often hazardous. This view leaves out of account the shrinkage of the world and the enormous increase in the volume and complexity of international business. Modern developments in international communications ; the increased dependence of nations upon each other's products ; the extension of colonies ; and the increasing interest of labour organisations in foreign policy, all tend to produce international problems of the greatest difficulty. Their solution frequently requires resources beyond those of the most competent and qualified diplomatist. Such questions can only be settled in Conference by persons who have their hand on the pulse of the political conditions and currents of thought in their respective countries, who have at immediate disposal all the technical knowledge which Governments possess ; who know how far they can persuade their fellow-countrymen to go in the direction of compromise ; and who, insomuch as they have to defend their policy before their respective parliaments, are alone in a position to make real concessions. In former days, when the final responsibility rested with a sovereign or a government these matters could be entrusted to an ambassador. Nowadays, when governments are often responsible to Parliaments elected on the widest franchise, it is no longer advisable to rely entirely on intermediaries.

This does not mean that the functions or prestige of diplomats are lessened. On the contrary, their responsibilities are increased and they require an even wider perspective than in the past to keep them abreast of the times. Conferences only touch the fringe of

their work, and there is an enormous mass of important intermediate business preceding or arising out of, or independent of, conferences, which the Diplomatic Service is called upon to transact. Moreover, it is more important than ever that Governments should be well informed as to developments and tendencies, in foreign countries. Even during the conferences the presence of diplomatists, who can advise their chiefs as to local colour, and between the meetings can act as intermediaries, is invaluable. Our own splendid Diplomatic Service has often exemplified this, a notable illustration being Sir Kennell Rodd's and Sir Francis Elliot's helpful participation in the Rome Conference of January 1917.

If the habit of meetings between responsible Ministers of different nations, the moment friction arose, through some organised machinery such as the League of Nations had become the established practice before 1914, when the Archduke was assassinated at Sarajevo, it is possible that the war would not have occurred. Meetings would automatically have taken place. The whole matter would have been probed and ventilated, and the public opinion of the world would have been brought to bear to stop the war. It is possible even that the method of diplomacy by conference might in time have eradicated the more fundamental causes of the war.

There may be room for wide differences of opinion about this or that detail of the Covenant, but all opinions would probably unite on the desirability that the leading statesmen of the Powers should meet at least once a year. What the public opinion of the world demands is that the catastrophe of war shall never be repeated. There is no panacea, but the best hope appears to lie in the judicious development of diplomacy by conference.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

#### I

Lord Haldane was seated at ease in the Secretary of State's chair at the head of the great table in the Army Council room at the War Office, smoking a cigar poised delicately on the two prongs of a tiny silver fork, which he always used for the purpose. On this particular morning, early in 1912, he had turned from his arduous labours of army organisation—now nearing their end—to an equally congenial task. The door opened and the Private Secretary introduced a small and rather embarrassed young man who, after shaking hands, sat down on the Secretary of State's left. Lord Haldane addressed him as follows :

Captain Hankey, I have been asked by Mr Asquith to help him in the selection of a Secretary for the Committee of Imperial Defence, and your name has been mentioned among others. I should like to know what has been your experience.

I replied—for the identity of the visitor is now revealed—that I was an officer in the Royal Marine Artillery, “soldier and sailor too.” After a few years at sea I had served in the Admiralty for five years, I had visited the principal British ports abroad as member of a Rearmament Committee initiated by Lord Haldane himself, and had afterwards helped Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord, in preparing his war plans. I had rendered a similar service as a member of the staff of the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean. Since 1908 I had been the naval assistant secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Lord Haldane then observed that I was very young for such an important post.

“When you were my age, Sir,” I replied, “you were a Queen’s

Counsel and a rising young politician"—it was a shot in the dark, for I did not know the facts, but it turned out to be true.

Lord Haldane then sprung on me the question: "What would you do if you received this appointment?"

I launched out into a long programme of defensive preparations, which needed urgent attention, and ended with two wider suggestions which at once gripped Lord Haldane's interest:

*First*, for the closer association of the Dominions with the Committee, with a view to a complete system of Empire co-operation in defence.

*Second*, for the eventual extension to Cabinet Government as a whole of the system of co-ordination which had already done so much to pull together the fighting Services and civilian Departments in the region of defensive preparations.

In discussing these two suggestions we fired each other's imagination. I got the job and, owing to events that no one could have foreseen, our dreams had come true in some shape or form within the next five years.

## 2

The British Cabinet, which is the focal point of our system of administrative co-ordination, derives from the Privy Council, so I must mention a very few pertinent points in its development.

Early in the thirteenth century there came into existence a Council—the Continual or King's Council—the members of which took an oath and which as early as the reign of Edward II was known as the *secretum* or *privatum consilium*. This Council was the medieval forerunner of the modern Privy Council and its constitution and powers remained substantially unaltered until Tudor times.

Minutes of the Council dating from 1337 and 1341 are known, but probably the records began even earlier, e.g., there is an Ordinance of 1298 by the King and Council, and there is mention of Clerks of the Council as far back as the reign of Edward I (1272-1307).<sup>1</sup>

In 1389 the Council used to meet between 8 and 9 o'clock—a.m., not p.m.! The King was not usually present. The Council

<sup>1</sup> Baldwin. *The King's Council during the Middle Ages*, 373 *et seq.* and Appendix I.

was nothing more than an assembly of royal officials and made no claim to independent authority. In 1426 special rules were passed for securing secrecy, none being—

suffered to abide in the Council, whiles matters of the said Council be treated therein, save only those that be sworn unto the said Council, but if they be specially called thereto by authority of the said Council.<sup>1</sup>

Such Minutes as I have seen are for the most part terse and to the point, but now and again the Clerk of the Council seems to have let himself go, as in the following passage :

And these words and many other gentle words he said benignly and goodly, that tears sprung as well out of his eyes as out of the eyes of all my said Lords that were there present.<sup>2</sup>

That passage leaves standing my own highest flights as Secretary to the Cabinet, and although I will admit to having on one occasion long, long ago seen a foreign statesman at an international conference burst into violent sobbing, I discreetly left it unrecorded.

In mentioning these details I want to make the point that, subject to occasional lapses, e.g., from 1460 to 1520, Minutes of the proceedings were kept from very early days.

Tempting as it is to linger over the constitutional development of the Privy Council, we must now leap over 130 years to the reign of Charles II, when an important development took place. After the Restoration, the Privy Council included not only members of the Privy Council of Charles I who had remained loyal to the Crown, but also some who espoused the cause of the Parliament. The number of Councillors, and the doubtful loyalty of some of them, therefore, rendered the Privy Council an unreliable instrument for the conduct of public affairs. In addition—

Charles hated the formality of long discussions, and felt with good reason that (to quote from his own declaration of 1679) a Council was “unfit for the secrecy and despatch which are necessary in great affairs.” The Parliament entertained the feeling that Ministers ought to be responsible, and ought to

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<sup>1</sup> Dicey. *The Privy Council*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

pursue some definite policy. If the whole Council were really the Ministry, this could not be. It was a body too numerous to agree together, or to be made responsible for its political acts.<sup>1</sup>

The King solved the problem by creating a special committee,<sup>2</sup> or (to use a term in use even in his father's reign) a "Cabinet" to which alone the secrets of his policy were confided. This body in reality, though not in name, superseded the rest of the Council. . . . At the same time Charles greatly increased the number of the whole Council; and thus obtained a valid reason for employing only a select body of his advisers.<sup>3</sup>

This Cabinet, however, or "Cabal" as it was called, only lasted about three years, and was very unpopular. It was followed by other expedients tending, on the whole, in the direction of evolution towards the Cabinet system as we know it to-day. That system and the next stages of its development are well described by Mr G. M. Trevelyan as follows :

By the Cabinet system we mean in England a group of Ministers dependent on the favour of the House of Commons and all having seats in Parliament, who must agree on a common policy and who are responsible for one another's action and for the government of the country as a whole. Neither Prime Minister nor Cabinet system was contemplated in the Revolution Settlement. They grew up gradually to meet the country's needs in peace and in war. The first approach to a united Cabinet was made by William III merely to fight the war against Louis, but he remained his own Prime Minister and his own Foreign Minister. In Anne's reign Marlborough acted as the head of the State in war-time for all military and diplomatic affairs, but he left to his colleagues the management of Parliament. It was Sir Robert Walpole, the Whig peace Minister from 1721 to 1742, who did most to evolve the principle of the common responsibility of the Cabinet, and the supremacy of the Prime Minister as the leading man at once in the Cabinet and in the Commons. . . . In driving out from his Cabinet all colleagues who did not agree with his policy or would not submit to his leadership as Premier, he set up the machinery by which Britain has since been ruled in peace and war. The Cabinet system is the key by which the English were able to get efficient government by a responsible and united executive, in spite of the

<sup>1</sup> Dicey. *The Privy Council*, pp. 135-6.

<sup>2</sup> Alpheus Todd describes it as a Committee for "foreign affairs." (*Parliamentary Government in England*, vol. ii, p. 66.)

<sup>3</sup> Dicey. *The Privy Council*, p. 137.

fact that the executive was subject to the will of a debating assembly of five or six hundred men. They solved this problem, which many nations have found insoluble, not, as was often contemplated in William III's reign, by excluding the Ministers from the Commons, but on the contrary by insisting that they should sit in and lead the House of Commons, like Sir Robert Walpole. The Cabinet is the link between the executive and legislative, and it is a very close link indeed. It is the essential part of the modern British polity.<sup>1</sup>

Up to and including the reign of Queen Anne it had been customary for the sovereign to preside at the Cabinet Council, but on the accession of George I, who could not speak English, Ministers started to meet by themselves, and to communicate the results of their discussions to the King. The transition to the modern system, however, was very gradual. Even Walpole met the whole Cabinet as seldom as possible. Like Mr Harley in Queen Anne's day, he liked to discuss Government business with two or three colleagues at a weekly dinner—a method which was revived by Grenville (1763-65).

During much of the eighteenth century there existed both an outer and an inner or "effective" Cabinet. There was often confusion about who composed the Cabinet and what degree of authority they possessed, which varied from a kind of honorary membership of an outer Cabinet to inclusion in an inner Cabinet with the privilege of a key to the boxes in which even in those days secret papers were passed round for perusal.

There was a setback in the development of the supremacy of the Prime Minister in the middle of the eighteenth century. It will be recalled that in 1757, after the bad start in the Seven Years' War, William Pitt, who had become Prime Minister in the previous year, coalesced with the Duke of Newcastle on the understanding that Pitt, as Secretary of State, was to run the war, including foreign affairs, and to preside at the Secret Committee of the Council, while Newcastle was to be the nominal head of the Government. The plan produced brilliant successes in the Seven Years' War, owing to

<sup>1</sup>G. M. Trevelyan. *History of England*, pp. 510-11.

Pitt's overwhelming personality, but there was a good deal of friction.<sup>1</sup>

In 1761 the Cabinet rebelled against Pitt's project for an immediate war against Spain. Pitt resigned and Earl Granville, the President of the Council, after expressing his regret at this decision, observed :

I cannot say I am sorry for it, since he would otherwise have certainly compelled us to leave him. But if he be resolved to assume the right of advising His Majesty, and directing the operations of the war, to what purpose are we called to this Council? When he talks of being responsible to the people he talks the language of the House of Commons, and forgets that at this board he is only responsible to the king. . . .<sup>2</sup>

After this there was another setback, for—

between the great Ministry of the elder Pitt and that of his son, intervened twenty years when government by responsible Cabinet and Prime Minister was in confusion, if not in abeyance. That break in the smooth development of our constitutional history was caused by the able attempt by George III to recover the powers of the Crown as they had been left by the Revolution Settlement of 1689, to make the Prime Minister a mere instrument of the royal will, and to reduce the Cabinet to a group of the "King's Servants" in fact as well as in name.<sup>3</sup>

This interval in Cabinet Government was not of good augury, for we threw away the fruits of the Seven Years' War by losing the American Colonies—though this was not due solely to the change of system. But,

From the day of Lord North's resignation, in March 1782, Britain has never been governed save by a Prime Minister and Cabinet responsible not to the King alone but first and foremost to the independent judgment of the House of Commons.<sup>4</sup>

### 3

Examination of the records of the eighteenth and of the early nineteenth centuries raises the interesting question of Cabinet Minutes. For many years there has been a widespread belief,

<sup>1</sup> Julian Corbett. *England in the Seven Years' War*, vol. ii, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Todd. *Parliamentary Government in England*, vol. ii, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Trevelyan. *History of England*, pp. 546-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 556

which still exists except among close students of history, that, apart from the Prime Minister's Cabinet letter to the King, there was never any record of the proceedings of the Cabinet until, in December 1916, Mr Lloyd George, with myself as his accomplice, broke the tradition. This myth, however, has been shattered by recent research. Even from 1739 to 1741 (George II), as shown by Mr R. R. Sedgwick in an article in the *English Historical Review*,<sup>1</sup> regular Minutes were kept of both the inner or "effective," and of the outer Cabinet of that day. The event, however, which was decisive in establishing the existence of Cabinet Minutes was the discovery in 1912 of the papers of King George III and George IV at Apsley House, where they had remained since the death of George IV, when they had been handed over to the Duke of Wellington, as one of the trustees of the royal will.

Their discovery is described in an article, dated 3rd November 1925, by the late Sir John Fortescue, then librarian of Windsor Castle, one of three published in *The Times* on the subject of King George III's papers, as follows :

In the early summer of 1912 there were brought to Windsor Castle a large bunch of rusty keys and a collection of some 36 chests and boxes, of all sizes, shapes and materials. These last contained King George IV's papers, which had for 82 years been buried in a cellar. A small group of men stood ready to receive them, among them an historical student who, in his secret heart, had built high hopes upon the discovery of this hoard. A large iron-bound box was first opened—not without violence, for locks and keys alike had suffered from age—and a packet was taken out of it which filled the student at once with delight and despair. It seemed to be no more than a mass of sodden pulp, but there was writing to be seen on it and he recognised the hand of Lord North. It was known that George III had arranged his papers for the first 40 years of his reign with his own hand. Evidently George IV's papers included those of George III. Here were the records, certainly of 40 probably of 50, eventful years, a treasure indeed in the eyes of a simple dry-as-dust.

Further investigation showed that, apart from this packet, few papers had suffered any material damage. All had been folded small, as if they had been

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. xxxiv. *The Inner Cabinet from 1739 to 1841*, by R. R. Sedgwick.

vouchers for a set of accounts, which, though the fashion of the day, was the worst thing possible for them ; and many had suffered from this treatment. Those that had been injured by damp might have seemed to the uninitiated to be beyond cure ; but the student had seen the skilled craftsmen at work in the binding-room of the Public Record Office and knew their magical power of restoring even the most dilapidated documents. Some hundreds, if not thousands, of papers were sent into hospital at once, but, though the sick-list was long, the actual deaths were very, very few.

As Secretary to the Cabinet I was, of course much interested, and I at once got into touch with Mr Fortescue (as he then was) who was good enough to send me a long manuscript letter, dated 11th November 1925, which is so illuminating that I am going to quote an extract :

Now we come to King George III. He chose his own Committee or Cabinet, subject to the old limitations against which, for very good reasons, he chafed. But the Cabinet had no right to meet, as a Cabinet, and to tender advice to the King, except at his request and by his authority. I have this in the King's own hand (anno 1782) ; and it was not questioned. He says to his Cabinet, "Here is such and such a question. Meet and tell me what you think," or they say "May we meet ? ", or at urgent moments, "We have summoned a meeting ; please sanction it." This, I think, is not generally known. Having met, the Cabinet submitted its opinion in the form of a *Minute of Cabinet*, which began with a list of the members present, place (often a private house), time, and proceeded to the resolution. Such minutes were drawn up by the Minister for the Department concerned, often so hastily that words were omitted, and often ungrammatically and sometimes almost illegible.

As I have written,<sup>1</sup> Ministers often took no copies of these Minutes, and had to ask for them to be returned. More careful men, such as Lord Grenville, kept copies of them, and those copies are to be found among his papers. The inference is that the only *complete* collection of the Minutes of Cabinet is to be found in the papers of the Sovereign ; and this, so far as George III is concerned, I believe to be the fact. Other Ministers may have kept memoranda of the decisions for their own purposes. . . .

Of course, members of a Cabinet (or some of them) met *informally* from time to time, formulated their opinions privately and carried them through the formal Cabinet—the key to much discontent among the members who

<sup>1</sup> In *The Times* articles.

were not of the "inner Cabinet," who complained that they had not been consulted.

The transition which transferred the choice of the Cabinet from the Sovereign (practically) to Parliament and the gradual exclusion of the Sovereign from all share in administrative business belong, of course, to the nineteenth century.

Since that letter was written the correspondence of both George III and George IV has been published, the former in 1928<sup>1</sup> (edited by Fortescue himself) and the latter in 1938.<sup>2</sup> Both collections contain a goodly selection of Cabinet Minutes. The first in George III's papers is dated, by an odd coincidence, "Great George Street, 5th April 1765"; the last in George IV's papers, 25th January 1828. The most prolific period is from 1780 to 1782 during the War of American Independence as well as with France and Spain, for which 88 Minutes are published. From the small number of Ministers who attended, however, it would seem probable that many of these Minutes relate to meetings of an "inner" Cabinet. The formula "Agreed to recommend to his Majesty . . ." is often dropped. The following letter from Lord Stormont to the King even suggests that the Minutes of the meetings were not invariably sent to George III:

I think it necessary to trouble Your Majesty with the last two Minutes as they are important, and as no steps can be taken towards carrying into execution the Minute relative to the relief of Gibraltar till it has had the Sanction of Your Majesty's Approbation.

When such sanction was required the Minute is sometimes marked in the left-hand bottom corner "Endorsed by the King."

While the form of the Minutes of George III and IV is fairly similar throughout the whole series, in the years 1779-82 it had become almost completely standardised. The following is a very short specimen:

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence of King George III, 1760 to December 1783.* Edited by Sir John Fortescue. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of King George IV.* Edited by A. Aspinall, Lecturer in Modern History, University of Reading. Cambridge University Press, 1938.

St James's, 4th January 1780.

MINUTE OF CABINET.<sup>1</sup>

[in Lord Stormont's handwriting]

at Lord Chancellor's<sup>2</sup>27th November 1779<sup>3</sup>PRESENT<sup>4</sup>

Ld. Chancellor  
 Ld. Privy Seal  
 Ld. Sandwich  
 Ld. Hillsborough  
 Ld. G. Germain  
 Ld. North  
 Ld. Amherst  
 Ld. Stormont

Agreed : To recommend to His Majesty to raise as soon as possible eight thousand men in Ireland to be employed wherever His Majesty shall please to direct."

That strikes me as an admirable minute.

The standardisation of the Minutes of this period promotes the speculation that possibly during the war a Secretary was introduced, following the precedent of the elder Pitt's Secret Committee, for which the late Sir Julian Corbett once assured me that there were two secretaries. Was there, perchance, a Sir Edward Bridges or a Sir Rupert Howorth somewhere around, if not to keep the Minutes,

<sup>1</sup> Later on, in George IV's reign, the title becomes "CABINET MINUTE."

<sup>2</sup> The normal practice was for the meeting to be held at the house of the Minister who summoned the Cabinet, that is to say the Minister primarily concerned in the business, who also was usually the draftsman of the Minute. In this case it is not clear whether the meeting was summoned by the Lord Chancellor, at whose house it was held, or by Lord Stormont, the Secretary of State, in whose handwriting the Minute is written.

<sup>3</sup> The hour, as well as the date, is sometimes stated : occasionally indeed with meticulous accuracy, particularly if the meeting is held very early or late, e.g. "  $\frac{50}{m}$  p. Seven a.m.," which means 30 minutes past 7 a.m.

<sup>4</sup> The Lord Chancellor, Lord President of the Council (not at this meeting) and Lord Privy Seal, in that order, invariably appear first in the list of those present and are mentioned by title and not by name. Other Ministers present are always mentioned by name only and not by title. The modern method of giving the name and title of each Minister is more convenient. Note that the Prime Minister, Lord North, appears quite low on the list. This is the case throughout the whole series of both reigns.

at least to put them into shape? In both earlier and later times, as pointed out in Sir John Fortescue's letter, the Minutes are often very untidy and there are fairly frequent lapses in details such as time, place, date, and even occasionally of the list of those present.

The Minutes printed with George IV's letters are on the same lines as the above, but more formal. The language is usually stately and dignified. They are written in the third person, either singular from the writer, or plural from "Your Majesty's Confidential Servants." These later Minutes (with the single exception of a Minute from the Duke of Wellington on 25th January 1828), all take the form of advice to the King (or Prince Regent). Sometimes they deal with matters referred by the King: sometimes the initiative comes from the Cabinet itself. Throughout both reigns the length of the Minutes varies considerably. In the war period (1779-82) they often contain much detail of the naval or military situation before coming to the recommendation. In a long Minute of a meeting held at the Foreign Office on 15th July 1824, written in Mr Canning's handwriting, all the factors of a complicated situation are marshalled in masterly fashion, reminding me of my own difficulties in similar cases. I have failed to discover any note of dissent by a member of the Cabinet, and the Minutes are almost invariably impersonal, and contain nothing which would enable members of the Cabinet to "Hansardise" one another.

The general impression I obtain from a somewhat hasty perusal of some scores of these Cabinet Minutes is that the King, even in the time of George IV, apart from his personal influence with his Ministers, had a very large say in policy; that the Prime Minister's status, as distinct from his authority (on which the Minutes themselves do not throw much light) was far from being established (e.g. his low place in the list of those present); and that in George IV's reign the principle of collective responsibility was well established.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the papers of King

William IV have not yet come to light, and I have not been able to discover whether Cabinet Minutes were kept during his reign or not. I had not expected, therefore, to find anything of the kind after his death. To my surprise, however, in turning over the pages of the *Letters of Queen Victoria*, in order to glance at Lord Melbourne's Cabinet letters, I lit upon a Cabinet Minute, undated, but from the context clearly relating to 10th May 1839. This is positively the last that I have been able to find. It is in much the same form and style as the later examples of the reign of George IV, and includes a list of those present. It begins with the words "His Majesty's Confidential Servants having taken into consideration the letter addressed to Her Majesty by Sir Robert Peel . . ." and deals with the vexed question of the appointment of the Ladies of the Bed-chamber.

Without touching more than the fringe of the subject of Cabinet Minutes I have, I hope, produced sufficient evidence that Minutes were kept from the earliest days of the Privy Council, with a few intervals, down to the time of the gradual transition to Cabinet Government: that there are traces of Minutes having been kept even during the transition period, e.g. from 1739 to 1741: that Cabinet Minutes were kept during a large part, if not the whole of the reigns of George III and George IV, and that they did not disappear until Queen Victoria's reign. These Minutes do not provide a continuous record of the principal proceedings of the Government, like the Minutes of the best days of the Privy Council or those of modern Cabinets. Nevertheless, their existence disposes of the argument which followed the institution of Cabinet Minutes by Mr Lloyd George that this was such an outrage to tradition as to make Mr Gladstone turn in his grave! If he did so turn it should have been because the business-like methods of his predecessors had fallen into abeyance! None of these records, however, touches the objections raised to the presence of a Secretary at Cabinet meetings.

The first mention I have been able to find of a Cabinet letter

from the Prime Minister to the Sovereign is dated 27th December 1837, from Lord Melbourne to Queen Victoria.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, Lord Melbourne's Cabinet letters were much less formal than Cabinet Minutes, and they sometimes included personal matters. They are good examples of the wise manner in which he was guiding the early footsteps of the young Queen over the slippery paths of statecraft. From this time onward<sup>2</sup> until December 1916, the Prime Minister's letter supersedes the Cabinet Minute.

In spite of the claim that the Cabinet system worked satisfactorily during the reigns of Queen Victoria and her successors, there is evidence in various biographies that a good many misunderstandings used to arise as to what decision had been reached. Here are a few examples :

*In 1867* : Mr Disraeli's speech introducing the suffrage resolutions in the House of Commons, was at variance with the impression of some of his colleagues as to the intentions of the Cabinet, and an important contributory cause of a Cabinet crisis which led to the resignation of the Marquis of Salisbury and two of his colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

*In November 1876* : A misunderstanding arose as to the instructions to Lord Salisbury, the British delegate at a conference at Constantinople, which led to "great discontent and disturbance."<sup>4</sup>

*In December 1877* : An important difference of opinion occurred as to the decision taken over a note to be addressed to Russia on the contingency of an advance by the Czar's armies to Constantinople (Lord John Manners to Queen Victoria).<sup>5</sup>

*In March 1878* : Lord Derby, in resigning from the Cabinet, gave as his reason an account of a decision of the Cabinet, which Lord Salisbury stigmatised "so far as my memory goes as not true," a phrase which in response to cries of "Order, order," he altered to "not correct." For this statement Lord Salisbury claimed the support of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Mr. Buckle, however, in an analysis of the original documents, reaches the conclusion that what Lord Derby said was "substantially correct."

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Queen Victoria, 1837-61.*, vol. i. p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Excepting the Minute of 10th May 1839, mentioned on the preceding page.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Gwendolen Cecil. *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, vol. i., chapter viii.

<sup>4</sup> Buckle. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, chapter viii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter v.

Similar difficulties arose during Mr. Gladstone's administration (1880-85) as to the precise significance of Cabinet decisions.

## 4

In the early days of the present century the story continues on much the same lines as before, while occasional instances can be quoted of misunderstandings in nearly every Cabinet up to and including that of 1915-16. Perhaps the worst case was on 29th July 1914, when several members of the Cabinet misunderstood what was involved in the decision to enforce what was called the Pre-cautionary Stage of the War Book. The situation was saved from chaos, however, by a provision which had been inserted in the War Book in anticipation of the possibility of some such misunderstanding in the Cabinet, and which threw on to the War Office the responsibility for notifying the decision to all the Departments concerned. Lord Haldane was delighted when I told him this story.

The defects in Cabinet procedure, however, were not fully realised until after Lord Curzon's exposition in the debate in the House of Lords on 19th June 1918,<sup>1</sup> in which he said :

There was no agenda, there was no order of business. Any Minister requiring to bring up a matter either of Departmental or of public importance had to seek the permission of the Prime Minister to do so. No one else, broadly speaking, was warned in advance. It was difficult for any Minister to secure an interstice in the discussion in which he could place his own case. No record whatever was kept of our proceedings, except the private and personal letter written by the Prime Minister to the Sovereign, the contents of which, of course, are never seen by anybody else. The Cabinet often had the very haziest notion as to what its decisions were ; and I appeal not only to my experience, but to the experience of every Cabinet Minister who sits in this House, and to the records contained in the memoirs of half a dozen Prime Ministers in the past, that cases frequently arose when the matter was left so much in doubt that a Minister went away and acted upon what he thought was a decision which subsequently turned out to be no decision at

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates : House of Lords, vol. xxx., col. 253.

all, or was repudiated by his colleagues. No one will deny that a system, however embedded in the traditions of the past and consecrated by constitutional custom, which was attended by these defects, was a system which was destined immediately it came into contact with the hard realities of war, to crumble into dust at once . . . and to make a long story short, I do not think anyone will deny that the old Cabinet system had irretrievably broken down, both as a war machine, and as a peace machine.<sup>1</sup>

To the evidence of experienced statesmen it must be added that civil servants often found difficulty in ascertaining from Ministers that decisions had been taken which affected their Departments, either because the Minister (especially if new to office) did not always know that his Department was concerned or what was the decision. In the early part of the war of 1914-18 I was frequently approached by senior civil servants as to whether I had or could obtain any information.

To explain the origin of the present system it is necessary to go back to a development which took place at the beginning of the present century, in which Lord Haldane was deeply interested, namely, the foundation by Mr Balfour of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1904.

When the Liberal Government came into office in December 1905, the Committee was in some danger, as Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had from the first doubted its utility. Lord Haldane often told me how he "begged its life" from the new Prime Minister, a boon that was granted on condition that Haldane kept an eye on it. Before his death, however, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had become reconciled to this innovation. The usefulness of the Committee as an instrument for war preparation may be judged from the fact that before 1914 the rôles of the Navy and Army in the event of war had been worked out and detailed plans drawn up, and the ancillary action by Government Departments to change over from a state of peace to a state of war had been embodied in a War Book, in which was set out the action to be taken by every Department, under a large number of headings. There

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates : House of Lords, vol. xxx, col. 265.

were, of course, gaps—there were no arrangements for expansion of the Army or industrial mobilisation—but our state of preparedness compared well with any previous war in our history. To all that work, Lord Haldane, who remained a member of the Committee after he became Lord Chancellor, gave all possible help and encouragement, presiding at or taking part in various inquiries.

At the outset of the war the supreme command was vested for nearly four months in the Cabinet of twenty-one members. That plan was not very satisfactory. As the private memoirs show, questions of importance and urgency kept cropping up, which had to be decided informally by small groups of Ministers summoned hastily, in a manner rather reminiscent of the eighteenth century. It was hard to keep track of the decisions. Meanwhile, the Committee of Imperial Defence was used mainly for questions of detail.

At the end of 1914 Mr Asquith regularised the position by appointing a War Council to assist the Cabinet. Lord Haldane became a member on 7th January 1915. In my own mind I had always cast him in the event of war for the rôle of Lord Hardwicke, "the wise old Lord Chancellor" of the Seven Years' War and a member of William Pitt's Secret Committee, but it was not to be. In June 1915, the Liberal Government fell and to the great regret of many people, including myself, Lord Haldane was left out of the new Government—the victim of monstrous prejudices which were happily laid to rest for ever after the war by the timely intervention of Field-Marshal Lord Haig. After the change of Government the War Council was succeeded by a "Dardanelles Committee," to supervise the operations in the Dardanelles, which, however, as I had warned Mr Asquith, involved every aspect of the war, so that a few months later it was replaced by a War Committee. All these bodies were, in effect, an adaptation of the Committee of Imperial Defence to war conditions. The Prime Minister presided. Their personnel, procedure, methods, Minutes and Secretary (myself) were the same, tuned up to the *tempo* of war conditions. Each Council or Committee was an improvement

on its predecessor as we groped our way by the light of experience to a better system.

These successive bodies were all subordinate to the Cabinet, to which, after the formation of the War Committee, all their decisions were reported. For a time this system worked well, but it had the basic disadvantage of dual responsibility, as the Cabinet had the right to reopen the decisions of the War Committee—a right which it exercised sparingly, but sometimes dangerously, as in the case of the evacuation of Gallipoli.

In December 1916, Mr Asquith resigned, the actual cause being a difference of opinion inside and outside the Cabinet as to the machinery for the conduct of the war. Briefly, and shorn of those personal factors that are always present at times of political change, Mr Lloyd George wanted to run the day-to-day work of the War Committee, leaving to Mr Asquith the leadership of the Cabinet and of the House of Commons—a device reminiscent of the Newcastle-Pitt arrangement in 1757. Mr Asquith, however, as head of the Government and as the man responsible to Parliament and to the nation for conducting the policy of the war, refused to delegate this great area of public business.

## 5

On assuming office, Mr Lloyd George cut the Gordian knot by fusing the Cabinet and the War Committee into one body, known as the War Cabinet. This body inherited all the powers and authority of the Cabinet—over the whole range of Cabinet business, and not only over the conduct of the war, as sometimes stated—together with the machinery and procedure of the War Committee, that is to say, of the Committee of Imperial Defence. For the first time in the history of the Cabinet a Secretary was present to record the proceedings and keep the Minutes of the Cabinet and of its numerous Committees, and orderly methods, based on those developed by the Committee of Imperial Defence,

were introduced, including agenda papers, the distribution (in advance of the meetings) of relevant memoranda and other material, the rapid communication of decisions to those who had to act upon them or were concerned in the second degree ; and the knitting up to the War Cabinet, not only of Government Departments, but also of numerous Committees covering a vast range of inter-Departmental business.

The War Cabinet consisted originally of five Ministers (afterwards increased to seven) without Departmental responsibilities, with the sole exception of Mr. Bonar Law, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. Their first duty was to assist the Prime Minister in handling the central policy of the war and of the civil administration, but individually each of them undertook the supervision and co-ordination of a certain range of inter-Departmental business on such questions as priorities, curtailment of trade, shipping, supplies to allies, etc. Mr Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, had and freely exercised the right to attend the War Cabinet whenever he wished.

Other Ministers, including the Service Ministers, were left free to attend to their administrative duties, but were invited, whenever their Departments were affected, to attend the meetings of the War Cabinet for those items in which they were concerned, in which case they were treated exactly as though they were full members. They all received every day the Agenda paper with a rough time-table and a list of the Ministers expected to attend for each item, and they had the right to make representations if they had been left out of that list. This system enabled Mr Lloyd George to carry out his desire to create new Ministries of Shipping, Food, Labour, Information, etc. The Chiefs of Staff of the Fighting Services attended for the discussion of military operations. There were a good many Cabinet Committees, including one for Home Affairs, which, under various names, survives.

A good deal turned on the Secretariat, which had to be expanded at very short notice and at a time when the New Brooms were

intensely active, and at first there were some hitches. Mr Lloyd George, however, had, with Mr Asquith's knowledge, often discussed with me academically the possible evolution of some such system, and on Sunday, 17th December 1916, after about a week with the new War Cabinet, I sat up half the night drafting the new administrative arrangements for the War Cabinet Office, and to this day they are based on that system.

Within a week or two of taking office Mr Lloyd George invited the Prime Ministers of the Dominions to an Imperial War Conference, which resulted in the formation of a body called the Imperial War Cabinet—"a Cabinet of Governments," as Sir Robert Borden once termed it. One session was held in March-May 1917, and another in July-September 1918. A great deal was accomplished in the direction of co-ordination, and, what was even more important, mutual understanding. The procedure was exactly the same as that of the War Cabinet, and the Secretarial end was handled by the War Cabinet Secretariat.

After the session in 1917 General Smuts, who had represented General Botha, remained behind and thereafter became to all intents and purposes a member of the War Cabinet. Constitutionally, I suppose, his position was rather anomalous for, although he was a Privy Councillor, he was still a member of the Parliament and Government of the Union and not of the British Parliament.

It will be seen that the visions which Lord Haldane and I had seen early in 1912 had already materialised by March 1917. The methods and procedure of the Committee of Imperial Defence had been introduced into the whole range of Cabinet business, and the free association of the Dominions in the far-reaching war development of the Committee of Imperial Defence had come to pass.

All this time I remained in close touch with Lord Haldane and our friendship ripened. I kept him abreast of all these developments and often sought his advice. Often Lord Grey of Fallodon, who was perhaps his most intimate crony, would be present at our

talks at Queen Anne's Gate in the familiar study overlooking the Park.

Towards the end of the war Lord Haldane became Chairman of a very important Committee on the Machinery of Government, set up by Dr (now Lord) Addison, the Minister of Reconstruction, and he invited me to give evidence before it on the subject of post-war Cabinet development. The Report contained the following recommendation :

But we think that there is one feature in the procedure of the War Cabinet which may well assume a permanent form, namely, the appointment of a Secretary to the Cabinet charged with the duty of collecting and putting into shape its agenda, of providing the information and material necessary for its deliberations, and of drawing up records of the results for communication to the Departments concerned.<sup>1</sup>

This advice was followed. When the Cabinet was restored to its normal peace-time size at the end of 1919 the Secretariat was retained.

Lord Haldane's Report also contained many other recommendations, including a suggestion for the re-allocation of the functions of Government between the Departments according to the services to be performed. But that suggestion was not carried out and raises large and controversial issues beyond the limits of my present theme.

In the meantime the Committee of Imperial Defence had been re-established. In 1923 a special Sub-Committee under the Chairmanship of Lord Salisbury, of which I was Secretary, had overhauled the whole organisation in the light of war experience and the emergence of a third fighting service—the Royal Air Force. The Chiefs of Staff Committee, which had been improvised during the Chanak crisis of 1922, and was already in operation, was formally established as part of the machinery of the Committee, and a recommendation was included that the Prime Minister, as President of the Committee of Imperial Defence, should be assisted by a

<sup>1</sup> Cd. 9230/1918, par. 10.

Minister as Chairman to act as his deputy in charge of the day-to-day work of the Committee. Mr Ramsay MacDonald appointed Lord Haldane as his Deputy. It was to my personal knowledge a deep satisfaction to Lord Haldane to come back to the Committee after twelve years of absence, and the truth of this statement is to be found in his own memoirs.<sup>1</sup> I need hardly say how much I myself appreciated this renewed association with my old friend, and I only regretted that, before the year was out, the vicissitudes of politics brought it to a premature end, but not quite to an end because, at my request, Mr Baldwin invited Lord Haldane to retain the Chairmanship of a Sub-Committee of Scientists, in the work of which he was taking a great interest.

In 1922, when Mr Lloyd George's Government was nearing its end, and Parliament—as usually happens at such times—was in a restless mood, the existence of a Secretary of the Cabinet, and especially his presence at its meetings, came in for a certain amount of criticism. After the change of Government, Mr Bonar Law, the new Prime Minister, decided to appoint me to the vacant office of Clerk of the Privy Council. At first I was reluctant to add this new duty to my excessive burdens at the Cabinet and Committee of Imperial Defence, but in the result it proved a happy inspiration. The rather artificial criticism died away when the Secretary became the Clerk of the Council, who takes an oath similar rather to that of the Privy Councillor. From 1923 to 1938, therefore, I held one of the most ancient and one of the most modern of the high offices under the Crown, for my first predecessor as Clerk of the Council was appointed at least as far back as the reign of Edward I, and I had become Secretary to the peace-time Cabinet in 1919. On my retirement this over-centralisation came to an end, and my functions were divided between three very able successors.

<sup>1</sup> *Richard Burdon Haldane : An Autobiography*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1929.

### CHAPTER III

## THE CABINET SECRETARIAT

THE case against the Cabinet Secretariat in 1923, referred to in the previous chapter, rested on two principal indictments : (1) that the principle of a Cabinet Secretary is wrong ; (2) that the application of the principle is wrong and extravagant. I shall here deal only with the question of principle.

Let us begin by an examination of the arguments on which the case against the presence of a Secretary at the Cabinet was based. We were told that what was good enough for Chatham, Pitt, Disraeli and Gladstone, should be good enough for modern statesmen and that in the past the Cabinet got on very well without a Secretary ; that secrecy is imperilled by a Secretariat ; that the old intimacy and informality, in which alone complete freedom of discussion can be carried on, are impossible if a Secretary is present taking notes ; that the Secretaries may obtain too much power ; and that in the Cabinet Secretariat the Prime Minister of the day has at his disposal a new administrative machine, enabling him to dominate his colleagues.

Let us consider the claim that the old system did in practice work satisfactorily.

It is doubtful whether the appeal made to the remoter days of Chatham can have been meant seriously. It does not detract from Chatham's achievements to recall that his methods would not commend themselves to those who attack recent constitutional innovations. His "Secret Committee," it is true, bore some points of resemblance to Mr Asquith's 1914-16 War Committee. But what would our constitutional pundits say of a system under which the Secretary of State issued orders direct to the Admirals

commanding the fleets, without passing them through the Admiralty?

Whether the story is true or not that the elder Pitt made it a condition of accepting office that Anson "should not possess the correspondence," there is no doubt as to his communicating direct with the Admirals.<sup>1</sup> And what would be said to-day to a repetition of the incident when Newcastle, the Prime Minister, as troops and guns and stores began to file in endless procession down the Portsmouth road past his house at Claremont, wrote to Hardwicke, the Lord Chancellor, "Where they go, God knows! I write treason. Not a word."<sup>2</sup>

Leaving these distant days, when conditions were so different from those of to-day, let us come to more modern times and examine the record of Lord Beaconsfield's, Mr Gladstone's and later Cabinets. Examples of serious misunderstanding due to different impressions of what was decided at Cabinet meetings, are to be found in such scanty records as exist of Mr Disraeli's Cabinets. These were mentioned briefly in Chapter II. and will now be given in more detail.

For example, in 1867, Mr Disraeli's speech introducing the suffrage resolutions in the House of Commons was at variance with the impression some of his colleagues had formed of the intention of the Cabinet, and this was an important contributory cause to the Cabinet crisis which led to the resignation of the late Lord Salisbury (then Lord Cranborne) and two of his colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

A more specific instance of serious misunderstanding occurred in November 1876, during Mr Disraeli's second Ministry (1874-80) over the instructions for the British delegate (Lord Salisbury) at the Constantinople Conference and is authenticated by the following correspondence:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Corbett. *England in the Seven Years War*, vol. i, chapter vii. Also vol. ii, chapter vii, "For Pitt, according to his usual practice when combined operations were concerned obtained from the King an order that Hawke was to obtain his instructions from him and not from the Admiralty."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii, chapter ii.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Gwendolen Cecil. *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, vol. i, chapter viii.

<sup>4</sup> Buckle. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, chapter iii.

*Mr Disraeli to Lord Derby (Foreign Secretary).*

19th November 1876. I hear from Salisbury that there is great discontent and disturbance at the "Instructions" having been sent down for the Queen's signature when *Lord Carnarvon, Lord Chancellor, and others did not consider that they had passed the Cabinet.*<sup>1</sup> What is to be done? They understand they were to be again considered on Thursday. I have sent Mr Corry to Lord Chancellor to explain that I doubted not you were under the impression that the general instructions were approved, and that the supplementary ones were those to be considered on Thursday. . . .

*Lord Derby to Mr Disraeli.*

*Private. Fairhill, Tonbridge, 19th November 1876.*

There can be no mistake as to what passed in Cabinet yesterday. It was clearly understood that the instructions were approved, the cause of nearly all the difficulty having been removed by the insertion of the words suggested by Cairns, which only excluded from discussion in the *Conference* the question of military occupation, leaving it an open question whether such occupation might not be agreed upon by the Powers in certain possible contingencies. This was to be made clear by a supplementary instruction, which was to be considered at the Cabinet on Thursday. I heard all that passed, and naturally attended more closely than anyone, the business concerning my department. It had never occurred to me, till I received your letter, that any of our colleagues could be under a different impression. . . .

Yet another misunderstanding of the same kind arose in December 1877 over the contents of a note to be addressed to Russia concerning the contingency of an advance by the Russian armies on Constantinople. The facts of the difference of recollection of what had been decided in Cabinet are contained in the following communication from Lord John Manners to Queen Victoria :<sup>2</sup>

4th December 1877. Lord John Manners with his humble duty to Your Majesty. At the Cabinet, after a short statement by the Prime Minister, Lord Privy Seal explained why the preparation of the note to Russia, which had been determined upon by a previous Cabinet, had been postponed, and then read the draft as he had originally drawn it, consisting of two parts—the first, asking Russia in courteous terms for a definite answer to our conditions of neutrality as to Constantinople and the Dardanelles ; the second containing

<sup>1</sup> The italics are not in the original.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter v.

an assurance that if her reply on these two points was satisfactory we should take no steps to oppose her further advance in Europe, or Asia. Lord Derby went on to say that, while the second part was drawn according to his notes taken at the time, *he understood that the recollection of some of his colleagues was of a different character.* He ended by suggesting that the note, instead of the form of a question, should assume that of a warning to Russia that if her armies appeared to menace Constantinople or the Dardanelles, Great Britain would reserve her liberty of action : omitting the second part altogether.

*Lord Cairns* stated his recollection to be at variance with that of Lord Derby as to the second part of the proposed note, and proceeded to suggest that a tentative effort at mediation should now be made on the basis of the Russian note of 8th June, and that the Porte should be informally sounded as to its disposition in that respect. Most of the Cabinet, Lord Derby at first dissenting, were of that opinion, and all agreed that a note of warning would be preferable to one of enquiry. Ultimately, on Lord Beaconsfield's suggestion, the two ideas were combined and Lord Derby was requested to draw up a note, for consideration at the next Cabinet, which should couple the warning to Russia with an intimation that Your Majesty's Government would gladly tender its good offices for a pacification. . . .

A further example of different impressions by different Ministers of what the Cabinet had decided was one which led to the resignation of Lord Derby (Foreign Minister) in March 1878. This incident also arose in connection with our policy towards Russia. In speeches delivered after his resignation, Lord Derby made a series of "revelations from the dark interior of the Cabinet," to use Lord Salisbury's phrase. One of his statements was as follows :

When I quitted the Cabinet in the last days of March, it was on account of the decision then taken—namely, that it was necessary to secure a naval station in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, and that for that purpose it was necessary to seize and occupy the island of Cyprus, together with a point on the Syrian coast. This was to have been done by a secret naval expedition sent out from India, with or without the consent of the Sultan ; although undoubtedly a part of the arrangement was that full compensation should be made to the Sultan for any loss of revenue which he might sustain. . . . My Lords, I endeavoured to induce the Cabinet to reconsider this determination and from whatever cause the change took place, I am heartily glad that that unfortunate resolution was modified.

Lord Salisbury, in the course of an indignant reply, spoke as follows :

The statement which my noble friend has made to the effect that a resolution had been come to in the Cabinet to take the island of Cyprus and a position on the coast of Syria by a secret expedition, with or without the consent of the Sultan, and that that was the ground upon which he left the Cabinet, is a statement which, so far as my memory goes, is not true.

In reply to cries of "Order" he substituted the words "not correct" for "not true." He added that, in his denial of Lord Derby's statement, he was supported by the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor, the Secretaries of State for India and the Home Department, the President of the Council, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the First Lord of the Admiralty.

Lord Beaconsfield's biography gives an interesting analysis of the evidence as to who was in the right in this controversy :<sup>1</sup>

"But the connected history which has been given here from original documents forces us to the conclusion that what Lord Derby said was substantially correct, and that the denial can only be justified on narrow and technical grounds. In support of this denial there have been published not only an extract from Northcote's Memorandum, drawn up after the close of the Ministry, but also a short note by Cross, evidently written in later life, and an extract from Hardy's diary of 19th July 1878. None of these is contemporary with the Cabinet meeting, even Hardy's testimony being nearly four months after date ; and they do not agree among themselves. Take the question of Cyprus. Hardy and Cross are quite certain that Cyprus was not mentioned on 27th March ; but, while Hardy admits that there was a decision about Alexandretta, Cross declares that, as the Cabinet were at that time contending for the integrity of Turkey, they could never have contemplated the dismemberment of that empire—which would, of course,

<sup>1</sup> Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, chapter vii. See also Lady Gwendolen Cecil's *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, vol. ii.

have been equally begun by the seizure of Alexandretta as by that of Cyprus. Northcote, however, states definitely and categorically that 'the Prime Minister . . . proposed to us the despatch of a force from India, which should occupy Alexandretta and Cyprus, and should so sever the Euphrates route and cut off the Russians from an advance on Egypt.' With this explicit corroboration of Derby's note and diary and of Beaconsfield's letters to the Queen, the question of Cyprus seems to be concluded."

## 2

The members of Mr Gladstone's Cabinet (1880-85) which followed that of Lord Beaconsfield, appear on several important occasions to have had the same difficulty as their predecessors in grasping the precise significance of Cabinet decisions on matters of the first importance. One of the instances is related in the following passage from Mr Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* :

... He (Lord Hartington) always found the proceedings at Cabinet meetings particularly hard to follow. The interchange of question and answer, of proposal and counter-proposal, the crowded counsellors, Mr Gladstone's subtleties, the abrupt and complicated resolutions—these things invariably left him confused and perplexed. After the crucial Cabinet at the end of April, he came away in a state of uncertainty as to what had occurred ; he had to write to Lord Granville to find out ; and by that time, of course, the Government's decision had been telegraphed to Egypt. . . .

Yet another occurrence of the same kind is described in an amusing private letter written on 6th July 1882, by the Private Secretary of Lord Hartington to Sir Edward Hamilton, one of the Private Secretaries of the Prime Minister, which was published for the first time in the *Manchester Guardian*, on 15th June 1922 :

MY DEAR EDDY—Harcourt and Chamberlain have both been here this morning and at my Chief about yesterday's Cabinet proceedings. They cannot agree about what occurred. There must have been some decision, as Bright's resignation shows. My Chief has told me to ask you what the

devil *was* decided, for he be damned if he knows. Will you ask Mr. G. in more conventional and less pungent terms? Yours ever, —

From correspondence between Lord Hartington, Lord Granville and Mr Gladstone, in October 1882, it is clear that another serious misunderstanding occurred at that time about a discussion at the Cabinet on the subject of communications between Mr Gladstone and Parnell.

Writing to Lord Granville on 11th October 1882, Lord Hartington says :<sup>1</sup>

As to the further communications which took place during the debates on the Prevention of Crimes Bill, my recollection is that the Cabinet emphatically disapproved of this. I see *no* necessity for *any* communication now. . . .

Again, writing to Mr Gladstone on 14th October, he repeats :

But when, in the course of the debates on the Prevention of Crimes Bill, some private communications were renewed or were supposed to be renewed, my impression was that the Cabinet expressed a very strong opinion against their continuance. . . .

To this Mr Gladstone replied on 18th October :

My recollection about the Cabinet is that there was informal conversation about it, but not any decision of any kind, much less that no communication should at any time be held with Parnell, except across the table.

The correspondence of the late Duke of Devonshire at the time of his resignation from Mr Balfour's Cabinet in 1903, reveals more than once the defects of a Cabinet system where there is no Secretary. Mr Joseph Chamberlain's letter of 21st September 1903, included the following :

What did I ask you before I went to South Africa? That you should retain the shilling duty and give a drawback to Canada. I thought you had all, except Ritchie, accepted this policy. While I was slaving my life out,

<sup>1</sup> The letters are given in full in Mr Bernard Holland's *Life of the Duke of Devonshire, 1833-1908*, vol. i, chapter xv.

you threw it over as of no importance, and it is to this indifference to a great policy, which you had yourself accepted, that you owe the present position.

Replying on 27th September 1903, the Duke writes :

As to any failure on my part to discuss the question with you, I think that we must go back to the Cabinets immediately before or after your visit to South Africa, the proceedings at which are still extremely obscure to me. As you know, I am rather deaf, and I am afraid, sometimes inattentive. I certainly altogether failed to understand that at the first of those a decision was even provisionally taken of such importance as that to which you refer, and it must have been taken after very little discussion. Nothing, so far as I know, was decided about the Budget before you came back, and though I recollect that you were annoyed by Ritchie's proposals, and made some protests against them, you did not oppose them in such a manner as to lead me to suppose that you took so strong a view of their effect as it now appears was the case. In fact, whether through my fault or not, your Birmingham speech, and still more, your subsequent speeches in the House of Commons, took me completely by surprise. . . .

Referring to another Cabinet meeting, Mr Balfour, in a Memorandum to the Duke of Devonshire and his other colleagues, opens as follows :

There appears to be some misapprehension among some of my colleagues as to what occurred in and out of Cabinet in the early part of last week in connection with fiscal reform.

An instance may be given from more recent times. Colonel Seely (afterwards Lord Mottistone) stated in Parliament the reasons for his resignation of the office of Secretary of State for War and they included the following :

I have misled my colleagues in the Cabinet inadvertently, and with honest intentions. They thought that the document which they prepared was final. I did not know that. Had I been present at the discussion none of this misunderstanding would have occurred.

Colonel Seely might have added that, if there had been a Cabinet Secretary, the misunderstanding would not have occurred. Earlier in his speech he explained that he had been present at the beginning of the Cabinet but had left to report to the King. When he returned the Cabinet was over, and it was what occurred during his absence

and of which it was no one's business to inform him, that led to his undoing. It would, of course, have been the duty of a Secretary to let him know what had happened.

Lord Selborne's resignation from the Cabinet in June 1916, would seem to have originated from an uncertainty as to a Cabinet decision. In his personal statement in the House of Lords on 27th June 1916, Lord Selborne explained that his resignation was due to what he regarded as an unjustified extension of Mr Lloyd George's mission to Ireland after the Easter rebellion in 1916.

I understood that the basis of the inquiry was an amendment of the Government of Ireland Act by which Ulster, or a part of Ulster, would be excluded from its operation, and that the Bill of Exclusion would be passed during the war. But I believed that neither the principal nor the amending Act would come into operation until the restoration of peace. This was not a vague impression. I had, and have, sure and definite grounds for believing that when Mr Lloyd George was appointed, this was the basis contemplated. In this belief I concurred in his appointment. It was during the Whitsuntide recess that I learnt for the first time that it had become a contemplated part of the proposed settlement that the Government of Ireland Act should, with certain modifications, be brought into operation during the war. I immediately—that is, the same day—informed the Prime Minister that I could take no responsibility for such a policy and placed my resignation in his hands.

This is precisely the sort of misunderstanding which is apt to arise when action is taken without a clear, definite and written decision.

Such is the record of the past. What was the evidence of contemporary statesmen?

By far the most important exponent of the theory that a Secretariat of the Cabinet is unnecessary was Mr Asquith. With all the weight and authority of one who entered the Cabinet thirty years previously, he declared himself in favour of the older system, though even he was careful in the parliamentary debate on 13th June 1922, not to commit himself too definitely against the principle of a Cabinet Secretary.

Against him we have the testimony of many other Ministers, e.g. the Prime Minister, Lord Balfour,<sup>1</sup> Mr Chamberlain, Lord Curzon and Lord Robert Cecil, who in the debates, though criticising its working said, "I do not believe in the exclusion of the Secretariat."

Among the ex-Ministers who have publicly declared themselves in favour of a Cabinet Secretary must also be included Lord Haldane and Mr Montagu, both of whom signed the Report of the Machinery of Government Committee (*Cd. 9230*), which contained the recommendation already quoted :

But we think that there is one feature in the procedure of the War Cabinet which may well assume a permanent form, namely, the appointment of a Secretary to the Cabinet charged with the duty of collecting and putting into shape its agenda, of providing the information and material necessary for its deliberations, and of drawing up records of the results for communication to the Departments concerned.

With the exception of Lord Robert Cecil, all the above Ministers had experience of both systems of Cabinet Government, whereas Mr Asquith only experienced the older system. The weight of evidence of persons of actual Cabinet experience, therefore, is very strongly against Mr Asquith. Moreover, Mr Adamson, on behalf of the Labour Party in the debate in the House of Commons on 13th June 1922, though criticising the cost of the Cabinet Secretariat, made a very definite pronouncement in favour of the principle.

And what is the evidence of those statesmen who did not share Mr Asquith's view? Lord Curzon's description of the old Cabinet system before the days of the Secretariat has already been quoted (Chapter II, page 53).

Mr Austen Chamberlain, in the debate in the House of Commons on 13th June 1922, was no less emphatic :

I am one of those who sat in a Cabinet under the old system, when no agenda was prepared of the business to be laid before us and when no record

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<sup>1</sup> "A Secretariat of which I am proud to think I was one of the original progenitors," Lord Balfour, Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, vol. li, No. 50, p. 32.

was taken of anything that passed in Cabinet or of any decision that was taken by the Cabinet, except such records as might be embodied in the letter written by the Prime Minister to His Majesty, and which was seen only by the Prime Minister and the Sovereign, and who has sat under the new regime when we have a Secretariat, and I say with confidence as my opening observation that no one who has had experience of both systems, and who at the same time sees the enormous addition to the work of the Cabinet which has taken place in recent years, would for one moment think of going back to the old unbusinesslike system which nothing but the comparative simplicity of the matters to be dealt with in those days rendered possible at all.

Later in his speech, Mr Chamberlain added :

I have known Cabinets break up under the impression that they had settled something, and every Minister going away asking his neighbour what was the decision to which they had come. The institution of a Secretariat makes that impossible, because the decision must be recorded, and, if not clear, the Secretary has to ask, "What have I to record?" That is of more consequence than some of those who have not sat in Cabinets would be led to suppose.

Is it possible to conceive a more scathing refutation of the claim that the system of Gladstone and Beaconsfield is adequate to modern conditions ?

Mr Asquith and others suggested that to keep a staff in ordinary times of peace for the off-chance that a Cabinet Minister may occasionally misunderstand a decision, is superfluous. If the occasion were so rare, this might be a reasonable line of argument. As Lord Curzon observed, however, in the passage quoted above, "the Cabinet *often* had the very haziest notion of what its decisions were." It is only in cases of great importance, leading to the resignation of Ministers, that the veil is lifted and then, as a rule, only in memoirs or biographies published long after the event. The Cabinet does not willingly wash its dirty linen in public. The cases of everyday were not heard of, though according to Lord Curzon and Mr Chamberlain, they would seem to have been more frequent than the advocates of the old system would admit.

In a letter published in *The Times* on 16th June 1922, Mr G. E. Buckle wrote :

Retired civil servants of eminence have told me that they have not infrequently been left in the greatest uncertainty as to the exact nature of the decisions taken, on which they were expected to act.

This observation gives the key to the weakness of the old system. The Cabinet is the mainspring of our whole system of administration. However efficient the Government departments may be, they are powerless if the authorities who have to take action do not exactly know what decisions they have to give effect to. The whole system becomes ineffective.

It is pertinent to ask why, if he was so satisfied with the merits of the old system, Mr Asquith, when the war came, attached a Secretariat to record the proceedings of the War Committee, upon which the Cabinet devolved so much of the higher direction of the war. In the debate of 13th June 1922 he spoke with some pride of this body :

" We established the War Committee at a very early stage—I think almost immediately after the outbreak—which took over to a large extent the functions of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Experts were present and we always had the leading representatives of the Army and Navy present, and a record was kept of their proceedings. If you consult the writings of any historian who deals with the history of the War, you will find in the records of that Committee a complete record almost day by day of all the military and naval decisions, and I think that was a very necessary step, because you could not constantly be referring these matters to the Cabinet. Cabinet responsibility, Cabinet Conferences, and the right of the Cabinet in all cases to take ultimate decisions was never impaired."

It may be observed that Mr Asquith's memory failed him on matters of detail. The first Report of the Dardanelles Commission made it clear that the Committee of Imperial Defence was found an unsuitable instrument for the conduct of the war ; that for the first few months the Cabinet itself directed the war ; that a War

Council was appointed only at the end of 1914; that this was succeeded after the formation of the first Coalition, by the Dardanelles Committee of the Cabinet, and that it was not until the autumn of 1915, more than a year after the outbreak of war, that the War Committee was formed.

Lord Curzon has also shown how Mr Asquith's War Committee was, by a logical sequence, drawn step by step from dealing with naval and military questions in the first instance, into the consideration of shipping, tonnage and transport, food imports, food production, tractors and ploughs, allotment of steel supplies, etc.<sup>1</sup> This, however, is in parenthesis. The main point is that this all-important Committee, which dealt with these vital questions, had to have a Secretary. Surely, then, the conclusion is irresistible that the Cabinet, the most important Committee in the land, must, even in ordinary times, have a Secretary. It is inconceivable that we should revert to a machinery which was deliberately discarded in time of national crisis, and which, to quote Lord Lansdowne, even before the war, "did begin to creak."<sup>2</sup>

## 4

In examining the allegation that secrecy is impaired by the presence of a Secretary at the Cabinet, it is useful to consider how far the old system could be relied on in this respect. So far as Ministers are concerned, the Cabinet depends for secrecy upon the Privy Councillor's oath. Nevertheless, as the Prime Minister pointed out in the House of Commons on 13th June 1922, there have, from time to time, been instances of leakage, long before a Cabinet Secretariat was thought of. Lord Salisbury's biographer, in a passage I shall quote, describes the convention of keeping a note of Cabinet proceedings as "futile as a safeguard for secrecy." Witness to this is borne by the diarists, from Creevey and Greville

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Reports : Lords, vol. xxx, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

down to the present day. Their pages contain many accounts of what passed at Cabinet meetings which they were not entitled to know. For years "Our Lobby Correspondent," "Our Parliamentary Correspondent" and "Our Diplomatic Correspondent" have made a practice of letting the public know what happens at Cabinet meetings. What is true in England is even more true in certain foreign countries where they have no Cabinet Secretary. All this is very regrettable—but is the danger really aggravated by the presence of a secretary and the keeping of a record?

In the debate referred to, Parliament was told that the decisions were forwarded to the Ministers concerned—not circulated broadcast. The Secretary who records the decisions is a civil servant bound to secrecy by rigid rules. As a rule a Minister to whom the charge of violating the secrecy of the Cabinet is brought home has merely to make an explanation to his colleagues and the matter is soon forgotten. A civil servant convicted of such an indiscretion would jeopardise his career. The risk is far too great for him to run.

In the debate of 13th June the Prime Minister pointed out that before the war of 1914-18, the Committee of Imperial Defence had had to discuss matters far more secret than the subjects which normally come before the Cabinet, and that the secretaries were not only present, but took a full note. Yet the secrets of the Committee were always well kept. He explained also that the machinery of the Committee of Imperial Defence is the machinery of the Cabinet. We know from the reports of the Dardanelles Commission and the annual reports of the War Cabinet that the same machinery was employed throughout the war by the War Council, the Dardanelles Committee, the War Committee and afterwards, by the War Cabinet and Imperial War Cabinet. These bodies dealt throughout a most critical period in the history of the nation with matters in which secrecy was often essential, not only to the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, but to the existence of the Empire. Surely an office founded on such a tradition can be trusted to preserve the secrets of the Cabinet in more normal times?

The argument that the presence of a Secretary will tend to fetter that freedom of discussion which is essential to an all-round consideration of policy, is one which deserves examination in the most sympathetic spirit. Both Mr Gladstone and Lord Salisbury attached the utmost importance to this.

Lord Salisbury's biographer tells us that in Lord Salisbury's view :

" A Cabinet discussion was not the occasion for the deliverance of considered judgments, but an opportunity for the pursuit of practical conclusions. It could only be completely effective for this purpose if the flow of suggestions which accompanied it attained the freedom and fullness which belong to private conversation—members must feel themselves untrammelled by any consideration of consistency with the past or self-justification in the future. The convention which forbade any note being taken of what was said—futile as a safeguard for secrecy—was invaluable as a guarantee for this irresponsible licence in discussion. Lord Salisbury would have extended it in principle to the record preserved in each man's memory. The first rule of Cabinet conduct, he used to declare, was that no member should ever " *Hansardise* " another—compare his present contribution to the common fund of counsel with a previously-expressed opinion. Any record kept of the discussion must gravely restrict this invaluable liberty ; if public reference to them was ever to be tolerated it must disappear." <sup>1</sup>

Mr Gladstone's view on the subject was no less definite. Mr Lytton Strachey, referring to Mr Disraeli, says that, " To the horror of Mr Gladstone, he not only kept the Queen informed as to the general course of business in the Cabinet, but revealed to her the part taken in its discussions by individual members of it."

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, vol. ii, chapter vi.

The question, then, is really an important one—do the keeping of records and the presence of a Secretary tend to trammel freedom of discussion? All, of course, depends on the nature of the record. No doubt this consideration animated Lord Robert Cecil in the strong plea he made in Parliamentary debate that the views of individual Ministers should not be recorded, and that the record should be confined to the conclusions. A stenographic record or a full summary of what each individual says is open to objection, but the same does not apply to an impersonal record of pros and cons and still less to a mere statement of the conclusions. The Prime Minister told the House of Commons, however, that the record is, in fact, confined to conclusions, so that this particular criticism disappears.

Much, also, must depend on the character of the Secretary. It is noticeable that the criticism now considered comes, in the main, from persons without actual experience in the Cabinet, who are not closely acquainted with the civil service. These critics do not realise the intimate relationship which has for years existed between Ministers and their principal permanent officials. The permanent head of a great Department of State is on almost the same footing of intimacy with his political chiefs as they are with one another. Ministers talk before them with the same freedom as they do with their colleagues. These men would sell their souls before they would sell their chiefs. The fact is that for years and years there have been Cabinet Committees—permanent Committees like the Committee of Imperial Defence, and *ad hoc* Cabinet Committees with secretaries attached. During the war of 1914-18—even in Mr Asquith's time—work was delegated by the Cabinet to an extraordinary extent to Committees. Mr Asquith once mentioned that his Government had set up no fewer than fifty such Committees.<sup>1</sup> Whatever criticism has been directed against them, no one has ever yet suggested that the presence of secretaries hampered freedom of discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates : Commons, vol. lxxv, p. 525.

Given the right system of record, and the right Secretary, this is a risk that may be disregarded, the more so in that the members of the Cabinet themselves are the most jealous guardians of Cabinet tradition.

The objection that a Secretary of the Cabinet may become too powerful is one that in theory applies to the permanent head of every Government Department with much greater force. It can only happen in a Department if a Minister is either deplorably weak or grossly incompetent. In fact, it hardly ever happens. In the case of the Cabinet, there are many safeguards against it. The Secretary is under the immediate control of the Prime Minister, who is *ex officio* Chairman of the Cabinet, and a man does not become Prime Minister if he is deplorably weak or grossly incompetent. Further, there are a score of Ministers, each with a great Department at his back, to see that the Secretary does not overstep his position. Any trespass by the Secretary on the responsibilities of a Minister of his Department, would bring speedy retribution. There would be short shrift for the Secretary in such a case.

The Secretary, we are told, has no executive responsibility. He records the decisions of the Cabinet and transmits them to the Ministers at the head of the Departments who have to act on them.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, there is always the check on the Secretary that, before any decision is acted on, the Ministers at the head of the Departments responsible for action—and in many cases, of course, more than one Department has to take action—see and check the record before giving instructions to take action. As the decision is neither taken nor executed by the Secretary, it is difficult to see where the opportunity arises for the Secretary to obtain too much power.

The last objection is that the Prime Minister possesses, in the Secretariat, and administrative machine of great power, which

<sup>1</sup> Mr Chamberlain. *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. clv, No. 75, p. 223.

places him in a position to dominate all his colleagues. Mr Austen Chamberlain, in his speech in the House of Commons on 13th June, 1922, described a conversation with the Lord President of the Council in which Lord Balfour observed "that he had now had a considerable Parliamentary experience, and he had never known a Prime Minister who was not accused either of being a mere cipher, or tool in the hands of some stronger colleague, or a tyrant who dominated over the Cabinet." Much, of course, depends on the character of the individual. Chatham dominated the Cabinet of which Newcastle was Prime Minister, and Lord Palmerston, in his own department, seems to have dominated Lord John Russell.

As often as not Palmerston failed to communicate even to him the most important despatches. The Foreign Secretary was becoming an almost independent power, acting on his own initiative, and swaying the policy of England on his own responsibility. On one occasion, in 1847, he had actually been upon the point of breaking off diplomatic relations with France, without consulting either the Cabinet or the Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup>

These are instances where a subordinate Minister dominated a Prime Minister. On the other hand Lord Beaconsfield and Mr Gladstone dominated their Cabinets. In all cases, the main factor must be the personalities of the Prime Minister and his colleagues.

It is not very clear, however, how the Prime Minister can use the Secretariat to increase his own power. If anything, the Secretariat would seem to act as a check on independent action, as it is its duty to communicate the decision to the Minister who is called upon to act. When the decision is written, it must be written clearly. It must be difficult for the Prime Minister, or any other Minister, to overstep it.

Such cases as those quoted, where Chatham set troops in motion without the knowledge of his Prime Minister, where Lord Palmerston sent important despatches without consulting his Prime

<sup>1</sup> Lytton Strachey's *Life of Queen Victoria*.

Minister, or where Mr Disraeli, in introducing the suffrage resolutions in the House of Commons, placed an interpretation on them which was at variance with the Cabinet's decision, could hardly have occurred if there had been a written record. Moreover, the fact of the Cabinet's working on an agenda gives Ministers a far better opportunity to raise any question on which they think the Prime Minister or any other Minister is assuming too great a responsibility (of which many historical examples could be given) than existed under the former system.

So far the weaknesses of the old Cabinet system have been exposed, and the criticisms directed against the new rebutted. Apart, however, from the circulation of agenda papers, the keeping of records, and their transmission to the persons who have to execute them, the present Cabinet system has positive advantages, as may be seen from a study of the War Cabinet Reports for 1917 and 1918 and of speeches in Parliament.

Part of the business of the Cabinet Office, we learn, is to keep Cabinet Ministers, and through them their Departments, informed of the whole development of Government policy. This fills a very real need. In former days the utmost difficulty was experienced in every Government Department in knowing what was going on in other Departments. Frequently enough a Department would learn for the first time from an announcement in Parliament of some *fait accompli* vitally affecting it, and on which it should have been consulted.

The Committee of Imperial Defence did much to correct this in the sphere of defence and foreign policy. But the defect remained in other branches of policy. Government departments naturally consider a question primarily from their own standpoint, and the Ministers and officials often do not realise the reactions of a particular course on other Departments.

There now exists, in the Cabinet Secretariat, an office for distributing information, thus correcting a grave defect in the constitution and securing co-ordination of effort. In modern times

this is vital, as questions tend to become more and more inter-departmental. This is specially true of the great questions which have arisen since the war of 1914-18—Reparations, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, Upper Silesia, the Rhineland ; and in home politics, Ireland, unemployment, the collapsed exchanges and their effect on trade, labour unrest, the measures required to maintain the essential services during great national strikes, and so forth. It is essential, in dealing with such problems, that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet should have a staff to assist them in dealing with them from a national as distinct from a departmental point of view. Thus they get the best out of every department, ensure full distribution of information, and prevent overlapping or hiatus. Such a staff must necessarily be a strength to any Government. Perhaps that is why the Opposition have protested so violently against it. And that is why, when their term of office arrives they will retain it in some shape or form. The arguments used now against the principle of a Cabinet Secretariat, were formerly employed against the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence, as Mr Asquith admitted on 29th July 1909 :

Considerable doubts and some apprehensions were expressed at the time of its original institution as to whether it could be made to fit in with the ordinary working of our administrative machinery, and particularly with the maintenance of the due and separate responsibility in the cases of the War Office and the Admiralty. These doubts have, I think, been solved, and these apprehensions allayed by the experience of these seven years. For myself, I desire to say at once, having now worked for the best part of four years in intimate and continuous relations with the Defence Committee, that I regard it not only as a valuable but as an indispensable part of our administrative organisation.<sup>1</sup>

It is safe to prophesy that history will repeat itself and that the critics, if they get the chance, will become the defenders of the Cabinet Secretariat as they became the defenders of the Committee of Imperial Defence !

The value of the present system to a Government has been

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates : Commons, 1909, vol. viii, p. 1381.

demonstrated in Parliamentary debate again and again, never more effectively than in the famous "Maurice" debate, when the Government's case rested almost entirely on the accurate records kept by the Secretariat of the War Cabinet. The refutation by Mr Lloyd George of Lord Eustace Percy's charges on the Upper Silesian question on 13th June 1922 was another good example.

I have dealt only with the question of principle as to whether a Cabinet Secretariat is necessary or not, and have proved that in the opinion of many of our most experienced statesmen, the system it displaced was sloppy and unbusinesslike. Instances culled from the past have shown that, on questions of the greatest national importance, Cabinet Ministers have been known to leave the Cabinet without realising what decision had been reached, and in other instances recollections of what had been decided were diametrically opposed. Such circumstances resulted sometimes in resignations of Ministers, and always in a weakening of that mutual confidence and trust which is the main strength of a Government. These instances, which only leaked out because they led to resignations of Ministers, have been of common occurrence and the Departments who had to act, often had the greatest difficulty in discovering what the decision was. Under the stress of war, even the present supporters of the old system had to devolve their business to a body equipped with a Secretariat—itself an admission that the other system was unreliable. The alleged objections have been shown to be either exaggerated, avoidable or without foundation.

The Cabinet Office has corrected serious defects in our Governmental system for distribution of information and co-ordination. There is no other committee, council or board in the land without a secretary. The Privy Council, the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Army Council, Board of Admiralty and every Government Department has its Secretary, as has every Parliamentary Committee. Every county council, district council, town council and parish council has its clerk. Great corporations such

as the Stock Exchange, Lloyd's, and the Baltic have their Secretaries. The same is true of every board of directors and every trade union, institution, society and club. Why then is it that the Cabinet, the most important committee in the country, which, subject to parliamentary control, is the mainspring of our whole system of imperial administration, was asked to muddle along without the first elements of businesslike procedure ? A village cricket club could not be run efficiently on such lines !

That the present system is a great improvement on that which it supersedes can hardly be questioned. That it has reached its ultimate and final form would be too strong a claim.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

#### I

THE Committee of Imperial Defence is young compared with our more venerable institutions. My first predecessor in the office of Secretary to the Defence Committee (Lord Sydenham) dated to 1904 ; in that of Clerk to the Council (John Prophete) to 1389 ! But if young in years the Committee is old in experience. At the tender age of ten years it was subjected to the supreme test of the war of 1914-18, during which it developed in a notable manner. From that ordeal it emerged with an unequalled experience, and resumed under peace conditions its position—to quote the Prime Minister's words at the Imperial Conference of 1926—as “our principal organ for the co-ordination of all activities in the sphere of defence.” During its short but eventful career almost every outstanding statesman, sailor, soldier and civil servant in this country, and many from the Dominions and India, made his contribution to Imperial defence in the room at Whitehall Gardens where the Committee used to meet—the pleasant room once occupied by Lord Beaconsfield, which he left because the stairs were too much for him.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone knows that it is often difficult to discover the real origin of a great war invention. Milton, describing one of the war engines of the fallen angels, hints at the cause—

The invention all admired, and each, how he  
To be th' inventor missed, so easy it seemed  
Once found, which yet unfound most would have thought  
Impossible.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Buckle. *Life of Disraeli*, vol. v, chapter viii, and vol. vi, chapter v. The room, which is depicted in the frontispiece, disappeared in 1938 when the whole of the Whitehall Gardens site, with its many historical associations, was demolished to make room for modern Government offices.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradise Lost*, line 497.

In the case of the Committee of Imperial Defence we encounter no such difficulty. Several contributed to the idea, but everyone agrees that the real founder was the Prime Minister of that day, Mr Balfour, who thereafter, in office and out of office, in peace and in war, in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords, watched over its destinies. Lord Midleton and Lord Selborne prepared the way by a Memorandum<sup>1</sup> circulated to the Cabinet in November 1902. A month later, the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, established by the late Lord Salisbury in 1895, was reconstituted tentatively as a Committee of Imperial Defence, but as yet without any permanent organisation. The late Duke of Devonshire, the chairman of the previous Cabinet Committee, presided, but henceforward the Prime Minister (Mr Balfour) attended regularly, and after the reconstruction of his Government in November 1903, himself took the chair.

In January 1904, Lord Esher's War Office (Reconstitution) Committee<sup>2</sup> issued its first Report, a prescient document devoted exclusively to the Committee of Imperial Defence.

“The British Empire,” the Report states, “is pre-eminently a great Naval, Indian and Colonial Power. There are, nevertheless, no means for co-ordinating defence problems, for dealing with them as a whole, for defining the proper functions of the various elements, and for ensuring that, on the one hand, peace preparations are carried out upon a consistent plan, and, on the other hand, that, in times of emergency, a definite war policy, based upon solid data, can be formulated.”

The remedy proposed was a reconstitution of the existing Cabinet Committee. The Prime Minister was to be its invariable President (on which the utmost stress was laid), with “absolute discretion in the selection and variation of its members.” As “the corner-stone of the whole edifice” there was to be a small “Permanent Secretariat.” On these lines the Committee of Imperial

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Series, vol. cxxxix, col. 617.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Esher (Chairman), Vice-Admiral Sir John Fisher, Lieut.-Col. Sir George Sydenham Clarke, Col. G. F. Ellison (Secretary).

Defence was formally brought into existence by a Treasury Minute dated the 4th of May 1904.

The prevailing note of the new organisation was elasticity. In theory the Prime Minister was the only member, but he could summon anyone he wished. In practice Mr Balfour and his successors summoned regularly those Cabinet Ministers and staff officers of both Services who were especially concerned with the larger questions of defence, other Cabinet Ministers, officials and experts being invited *ad hoc* according to the particular business before the Committee. In this way the number of people associated with the Committee and its sub-committees in the course of a year came to number hundreds.

The Committee was, and remains, advisory and consultative. The Cabinet, as the Executive of Parliament, must decide all questions of major policy ; and defence policy, which is only one aspect of general policy, and is bound up with other aspects—such as financial, home, foreign, imperial and colonial policy—is no exception. So far as His Majesty's Government in Great Britain is concerned, the system was, and remains, that on questions of defence involving more than one Government Department the Committee of Imperial Defence advises ; the Cabinet, in the light of wider considerations, decides, and the Government Departments execute. In the case of a Dominion, the decision and execution rest with its Government. The whole conception is explained very clearly in the following extract from a speech by Lord Balfour in 1904 :

I think that my hon. friend need not fear that the Defence Committee will in any sense trench upon the responsibilities which properly lie in the first place with the Admiralty or the Army Department, and in the second remove with the Cabinet as a whole. In truth, I think that one of the great merits of the Defence Committee is that it has no executive authority at all. It has no power to give an order to the humblest soldier in His Majesty's Army or the most powerless sloop under the control of the Admiralty. I think that this is especially valuable from a point of view not yet touched upon—namely, the relations between the Defence Committee and those

self-governing Colonies of the Empire over which no office in this country has any control at all. I hope that when any problem of defence which touches them nearly comes up, and even when they take a closer interest in the problems of Imperial defence as a whole, we may have the advantage of their assistance in our councils. But I am certain that the self-governing Colonies will never allow any representative of theirs to come to the Defence Committee if the Defence Committee with that addition had the smallest authority to impose obligations, financial, political, military, or naval, on the Colonies which they represent. But we are so constituted that the only thing the Defence Committee may give, either to a Department at home or to the Cabinet or to the Colonial Governments, is advice.

It is quite true that, so far as the Home Departments are concerned, advice from a Committee which contains the Prime Minister, and which practically never meets without having the assistance of the Secretary of State for War, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Head of the Army General Staff, the Head of the Army Intelligence Department, the First Sea Lord, and the Head of the Naval Intelligence Department—it is, I say, practically certain that a Committee so constituted is likely to have its advice taken by the Departments; but we have a great many functions to perform which go outside the jurisdiction of any of those offices. There are the self-governing Colonies, and anything they can do or are ready to do for Imperial defence. There is India. It is, no doubt, intimately connected with the problem of defence and with the Government of this country, but the Cabinet cannot give orders to India in the same sense, or with the same facility, or, indeed, in any way corresponding to the way in which they give orders to the First Lord of the Admiralty or the Secretary for War. It is, therefore, from that point of view of the very first importance that our functions should be so restricted that we cannot interfere with administration in any way either at home or abroad. It is only by thus strictly limiting our functions that we can have that authority which I hope we shall more and more gain in the general scheme of Imperial defence, and that our opinions will carry that weight which will be all the more effective because there is behind them no power of coercive authority.<sup>1</sup>

One distinctive feature of the early days of the Committee was the care lavished on it by Mr Balfour. In his last two years of office he did not miss one of the sixty meetings. This period might be termed the phase of principle, for the Committee was largely engaged in hammering out the great fundamental principles

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Series, 1904, vol. cxxxix, cols. 618 and 619.

governing our Imperial Defence in such matters as reliance on sea-power ; the respective rôles of the Navy and Army ; home defence ; the defence of India ; coast defence, etc.—principles which have stood the test until to-day. In this work Lord Balfour was assisted by Lord Sydenham, the first Secretary, who organised the Secretariat on lines so sound that they have been followed *mutatis mutandis* ever since. He was succeeded in 1907 by my immediate predecessor, Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Ottley, who occupied the post with great distinction throughout a strenuous period until my appointment in May 1912, after four years' apprenticeship as an Assistant Secretary.

With the advent to office of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman the friends of the Committee felt some misgivings, as the new Prime Minister was known to feel doubts as to its usefulness. But their fears proved groundless, for, as Mr Asquith told the House of Commons a few years later, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, “after he had served on the Committee a few years, had attended and presided at its deliberations, was satisfied that it was a useful, and indeed an invaluable addition to our constitutional machinery.”<sup>1</sup>

One innovation made by Sir Henry was an invitation to Lord Esher to attend regularly. Lord Esher, as Chairman of the War Office (Reconstitution) Committee, was, as it were, godfather to the Defence Committee. From 1906 to 1914 he rarely missed a meeting, and rendered invaluable service. Mr Asquith increased the panel of regular attendants by a number of distinguished former occupants of high offices associated with the Committee of Imperial Defence, such as Lord Morley (after he had left the India Office to become Lord President of the Council), Lord Haldane (who in 1912 had left the War Office to become Lord Chancellor), Lord Kitchener, Lord Fisher, Sir Arthur Wilson, Lord French, and Lord Nicholson.

This practice, however, was overdone. The Committee

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, Commons, 1912, vol. xli, cols. 1385-1386.

became too numerous. The position also was sometimes awkward when the views of elder statesmen conflicted with those of the responsible advisers. Consequently, after the war of 1914-18 the appointment of elder statesmen was abandoned.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman also left his mark on the Committee by an extension of the sub-committee system, which was still further developed by Mr Asquith. Some of these sub-committees were permanent ; others set up *ad hoc* for particular inquiries. The permanent committees, *viz.*, the Overseas Defence Committee, Home Ports Defence Committee, Co-ordination Committee, and Air Committee, dealt mainly with details, and were composed of staff officers and permanent officials.

Larger questions of policy were dealt with by committees appointed *ad hoc* and composed of Cabinet Ministers and officers holding the highest Service appointments. Their work is outlined in Lord Oxford's book, *The Genesis of the War*. After describing the political developments which compelled those responsible for the Government to have in mind the possibility of Great Britain being engaged in a great war, however much against her will, Lord Oxford says, "It was therefore our manifest duty, and we never lost sight of it, to prepare for the worst." He tells how one detailed inquiry followed another—

In 1907, under Lord Morley, into the military requirements of the Empire as affected by India ;

In 1907-8, under Mr Asquith himself, into the risk of invasion. This investigation was set on foot at the instance of Mr Balfour, who drew Mr Asquith's attention to Lord Roberts' misgivings. It is interesting to recall that, after some months' inquiry, Mr. Balfour (who, of course, was then in Opposition) was sent all the papers and attended a meeting to give his views. Mr Balfour was also a full member of another committee on the same subject in 1913-14.

In 1908-9 a most important inquiry under Mr Asquith into the military needs of the Empire as affected by the Continent of Europe ; as well as inquiries under Lord Morley into our military needs as affected by Egypt, and into the position in Southern Persia and the Persian Gulf, with special regard to the Baghdad Railway ; and under Mr Asquith into Lord Charles

Beresford's allegations against the Admiralty, the Report of which latter was published as a Parliamentary Paper (Cmd. 256, 1909).

These and other inquiries, covering a vast field, may be described as the phase of policy in the evolution of our defensive preparation to meet the new political grouping of Europe. It was completed by August 1909.

"It would not be an unjust claim to say," writes Lord Oxford, that "the Government had by that date investigated the whole of the ground covered by a possible war with Germany—the naval position; the possibilities of a blockade; the invasion problem; the continental problem; the Egyptian problem."<sup>1</sup>

## 2

The next phase, if we may so term the evolution of events, was one of detailed preparation. Lord Oxford describes how inquiries were inaugurated into such matters as the treatment of enemy and neutral shipping; enemy trade; our own supplies; control of railways and ports; insurance of ships and cargoes against war risks; counter-espionage; censorship; treatment of enemy aliens; cable and wireless communications. Between 1909 and 1914 these and other detailed questions were systematically examined by a series of sub-committees, the conclusions, after approval by the Committee of Imperial Defence, being embodied in a "War Book," where the responsibility of Government Departments for action in an emergency was laid down.

Representatives of the Dominions attended meetings of the Committee during the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909 and the Imperial Conference, 1911, when important statements on all aspects of Imperial defence as affected by international developments were made by Mr Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and other Ministers, and the whole position was explained. These statements were brought up to date in the following year at meetings

<sup>1</sup> *The Genesis of the War*, chap. xv.

attended by Sir Robert Borden and some of his colleagues in the Canadian Cabinet. Between 1912 and the outbreak of war, other representatives of the Dominions on visits to this country from time to time attended meetings of the Committee ; for example, Sir James Allen, on behalf of New Zealand ; Mr White and Mr Burrell, on behalf of Canada ; Sir Edward (afterwards Lord) Morris, on behalf of Newfoundland ; and Sir George Perley, who, in addition to holding the post of High Commissioner for Canada, had authority to attend meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence. In addition, the Dominions and Colonies were kept informed of our inquiries, so far as applicable to them, and made their own plans.

All these preparations were precautionary and non-provocative, and, as Lord Grey well said—

The distinction between preparations made with the intention of going to war and precautions against attack is a distinction clear and definite in the minds of those who build up armaments.<sup>1</sup>

There were, however, some very important *lacunæ*. For example, no arrangements were made for the expansion of the Army, or control of man-power, or of industry.

We had banked on sea-power, in anticipation that our continental Allies would be able to deal with the German armies, and little realising the great preponderance of German strength and efficiency.

Given the circumstances of the day—a hundred years without a great war, the inexperience of statesmen and soldiers alike of war on the grand scale, a Government busy on a great programme of social reform, a policy directed above all to the maintenance of peace—given all this, our defensive arrangements were not ineffective. They did secure that (with trifling exceptions) our territory remained intact ; that panic was avoided ; that our trade continued without serious interruption ; that the enemy's trade was brought to a standstill until indirect channels could be

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-five Years*, chap. vi.

found ; that our small Army was swiftly and silently transported to France without loss. The pre-arranged steps for passing from a state of peace to a state of war in a single night worked, on the whole, smoothly and silently.

Special arrangements had been made so that in every office responsible officials should be ready at all hours to take immediate action. The requisite telegrams—amounting to thousands—were carefully arranged in order of priority of despatch in order to prevent congestion on the day of action ; every possible letter and document was kept ready in an addressed envelope ; special envelopes were designed so that they could at once be recognised as taking priority of everything. All necessary papers, Orders in Council and Proclamations, were printed or set up in type, and so far was the system carried that the King never moved without having with him those which required his immediate signature.<sup>1</sup>

When the Cabinet dispersed on that fateful evening of the outbreak of war, after the solemn silence which we are told followed the last stroke of Big Ben, they knew that the arrangements which had taken so long to prepare were set in motion ; that the news had been flashed to the remotest corners of the world, to warships, Dominions, India, Colonies, Protectorates, embassies, legations, to police authorities, port authorities and railway officials, and that everywhere pre-arranged instructions would be acted on ; that the Grand Fleet was at its station ; that patrols were at sea, and coast batteries vigilant ; that the Army mobilisation arrangements were complete ; that the enemy's merchant ships were being detained in port throughout the Empire ; that our own mercantile marine would put to sea under the protection of the Navy, but insured against war risks ; that enemy aliens would be dealt with ; that the enemy's espionage system was already being broken up ; that printers were striking off Proclamations already set up in type, and bill-stickers were waiting to post them up ; that the Press had agreed not to publish information of value to the enemy. Next day, with their minds freed from this mass of administrative detail, they could confront the gigantic task before them.

<sup>1</sup> Corbett. *Naval Operations*, vol. i, chap. i.

The late Sir Julian Corbett sums up the matter in the following passage of the Official Naval History :

Amongst the many false impressions that prevailed, when after the lapse of a century we found ourselves involved in a great war, not the least erroneous is the belief that we were not prepared for it. Whether the scale on which we prepared was as large as the signs of the times called for, whether we did right to cling to our long-tried system of a small Army and a large Navy, are questions which will long be debated ; but, given the scale which we deliberately chose to adopt, there is no doubt that the machinery for setting our forces in action had reached an ordered completeness in detail that has no parallel in our history.

The great work of the Admiralty, War Office, and other Government Departments must not be underrated, but this result could never have been achieved without the central co-ordination of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

## 3

During the war the Committee of Imperial Defence underwent great changes, but the procedure and methods of the Committee and its Secretariat persisted throughout all the developments of nomenclature and organization in the higher control of the war. Only for the first few weeks did the Committee carry on its work on the same lines as before the war, working mainly through sub-committees, one of which was devoted to the smaller overseas expeditions. During this period the Cabinet kept the main conduct of the war in its own hands. This arrangement, however, did not last long. Thomas Hobbes says in the *Leviathan* :

Fourthly, in Deliberations that ought to be kept secret (whereof there be many occasions in Publicke Businesse) the Counsells of many, and especially in Assemblies, are dangerous ; And therefore great Assemblies are necessitated to commit such affairs to lesser numbers, and of such persons as are most versed, and in whose fidelity they have most confidence. (Chapter xxv.)

On this principle, from November 1914 until December 1916, the detailed study of larger questions of strategy was, with the consent of the Cabinet, referred to a smaller body known at first as the "War Council"; immediately after the formation of the first Coalition Government as the "Dardanelles Committee"; and a few months latter, as the "War Committee."<sup>1</sup> These bodies, as Mr Asquith informed the House of Commons, absorbed the functions of the Committee of Imperial Defence,<sup>2</sup> which they closely resembled. The main difference was that they had more executive authority, the extent of which was explained by Mr Asquith to the House of Commons in the following terms :

I entirely agree with those who say—and I have had plenty of experience—that it is very undesirable, and leads to delay and often to confusion, that decisions which have to be taken, very often at very short notice, should not become effective until they are referred to the Cabinet as a whole. That is perfectly true. I think a Committee such as I have indicated ought to be clothed with power to take such decisions, and to act upon them. On the other hand, I am very jealous of the maintenance of collective Cabinet responsibility for large changes and new departures in policy; but I believe that in practice it will be found perfectly capable of working out two things together. That is what we propose to do.<sup>3</sup>

Subject to this and to some minor technical differences (such as meeting at 10 Downing Street, instead of 2 Whitehall Gardens, and elaborate precautions for secrecy), "the composition and function of the War Council did not materially differ from those of the Committee of Imperial Defence."<sup>4</sup> The Chairman and the Secretary were the same for both. The members were chosen from among the regular attendants at the Committee of Imperial Defence, and included the Chiefs of Staff of the fighting Services. And, as at the Defence Committee, other Ministers and high naval and military officers, such as the Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Force, were invited to the War Council or War

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 1915, vol. lxxv, col. 525.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1653.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 526.

<sup>4</sup> *First Report of the Dardanelles Commission*, para. 15.

Committee when the business required. Mr Balfour (though not in office) and Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson (who held no official appointment) were regularly invited to the original War Council, and once, when the Russian claim to Constantinople and the Straits was under consideration, Lord Lansdowne and Mr Bonar Law, the leaders of the Opposition, attended.<sup>1</sup> In June 1916, Mr Hughes, the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, attended a meeting of the War Committee. In a word, Mr Asquith's War Council and War Committee were an adaptation to the circumstances of the war of the elastic machinery devised by Lord Balfour in 1904, the only important difference being that the new body, although still subordinate to the Cabinet, had greater powers of decision than the Committee of Imperial Defence.

When Mr Lloyd George became Prime Minister, a further development took place, and the functions of the Cabinet and War Committee were combined in a smaller body known as the "War Cabinet," composed of the Prime Minister and five other Ministers, all of whom, with the exception of Mr Bonar Law, were without portfolio.

In his essay on *Counsel*, Bacon says :

The counsels at this day in most places are but familiar meetings, where matters are rather talked on than debated. And they run too swift to the order or act of counsel. It were better that, in causes of weight, the matter were propounded one day and not spoken to till next day ; *in nocte consilium*.

The War Cabinet system complied with this dictum by bringing to the whole range of Cabinet business the tried methods of the Committee of Imperial Defence, namely, the propounding of the question one day in agenda papers with the circulation of memoranda on all its aspects, and its discussion on a later day with a full record of the decisions reached, which was promptly communicated to all whom it might concern.

The War Cabinet, of course, had the full powers of decision of the former Cabinet, instead of the more limited powers of the

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis*, Churchill, vol. ii, chap. ix.

War Committee. Apart from this, all the distinctive features of the Committee of Imperial Defence were carried on : the elasticity of procedure ; the close association of the Chiefs of Staff of the fighting Services ; the summoning of outside Ministers, staff officers and experts ; the extensive use of sub-committees and the rest. The Secretariat was the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence, enlarged to enable it to cope with the work. This Secretariat also served the Imperial War Cabinet (*i.e.* the War Cabinet enlarged to include representatives of the Dominions and India), which was brought into being shortly after the establishment of the War Cabinet, and which, as Mr Winston Churchill says, "centred in a single executive the world-spread resources of the British monarchy."<sup>1</sup> In November 1917, a branch of the Secretariat was established at Versailles as the British Section of the Allied Secretariat of the Supreme War Council.

To enter here into detail of the work of these bodies is impracticable. It is sufficient to note that the Committee of Imperial Defence provided the foundation on which three successive Governments erected their machinery for co-ordinating the responsibilities of the admirals and generals, whose task was to beat the enemy, with those of the statesmen and civilians who had to provide the means amid a thousand conflicting demands, out of resources which, especially in the later stages of the War, were severely strained. I do not say that this machinery cannot be criticised, but, so far as my knowledge goes, no belligerent in the 1914-18 war evolved anything better. For example, General Ludendorff tells us that :

The machinery of government in Berlin gave the impression of being extremely clumsy. The various departments worked side by side without any real sympathy or cohesion, and there was infinite "overlapping." The left hand did not know what the right hand was doing.<sup>2</sup>

At any rate, the War Cabinet and Imperial War Cabinet, erected on the foundations so well and truly laid by Mr Balfour, were the

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis, 1916-18*, chapter x.

<sup>2</sup> *My War Memories*, p. 263.

instruments by which Mr Lloyd George and his colleagues steered us to victory.

## 4

In November 1919, after the Peace Conference, the war-time union of the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence was dissolved. The War Cabinet was replaced by a Cabinet of normal size, and the Committee of Imperial Defence reverted to a peace footing under its maiden name. At first the atmosphere was unfavourable. The world was in chaos ; crisis succeeded crisis at home and abroad ; demobilisation was in full swing ; the Government and the whole administration were overburdened with all these problems ; the strictest economy was the order of the day ; the nation was war-weary, and the thought of recommencing defensive preparation odious ; data for reconstruction of our defensive organisation were lacking.

We had, however, some assets. The Committee of Imperial Defence, of course, had in its custody the archives of its war progeny the War Council, Dardanelles Committee, War Committee, War Cabinet, Imperial War Cabinet, as well as of the Inter-Allied Conferences, Supreme War Council and Peace Conference, and of all their subordinate organisations. There was a Historical Section (which had by 1927 provided fifteen<sup>1</sup> volumes of official history), and there were exhaustive reports from many departments and committees on their war experience, which first Mr Asquith and later Mr Lloyd George had had prepared. There were available also persons with every type of war experience. Before the war we had often deplored the lack of full records of the administrative experience of the Napoleonic Wars—I myself once spent six months in research on one single subject. A number of sub-committees were set up, therefore, in February 1920, to overhaul our pre-war arrangements in the light of accumulated experience. If ever we or our descendants have once more to meet a great

<sup>1</sup> In 1945 more than fifty.

emergency, ignorance of what was done in the 1914-18 war should not prove a difficulty.

In May 1921, Mr Lloyd George, unable amid his overwhelming preoccupations to give much time to the Committee, set up a body called the Standing Defence Sub-Committee, over which he asked Lord Balfour to preside. In all but name it was the Committee of Imperial Defence, and its records are reckoned and numbered as those of the parent Committee. I only mention the point in order to show that the title of the Committee has changed occasionally in peace as well as in war. But soon the work began to develop on normal lines, and by the summer of 1921 the Committee of Imperial Defence was again in full swing.

There was one new factor which rendered the work of the Committee even more important than before the war, namely, the existence of the Royal Air Force as a separate Service under a separate Ministry. If co-ordination had been necessary when there were but two Services, how much more essential was it when there were three ! The problems thus presented attracted much public attention. Many proposals were made for simplifying the problem, such as the re-absorption of the Air Force into the older Services ; the absorption of all three Ministries into a single Ministry of Defence ; the formation of a Ministry of Defence superimposed on the three Ministries ; a joint General Staff ; the amalgamation of the common administrative services, and so forth.

These proposals, and variants of them, were exhaustively investigated, on the policy and staff side, by a sub-committee under Lord Salisbury<sup>1</sup> (who was acting as Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence), and on the administrative side by Lord Weir's Committee on the Amalgamation of Services Common to the Navy, Army and Air Force.<sup>2</sup> Both Reports were published as Parliamentary Papers. The more drastic changes were rejected by both these inquiries. The useful results of Lord Weir's recom-

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 2029.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 26/4926.

mendations lie outside our subject, but Lord Salisbury's Committee's resulted in developments to the Committee of Imperial Defence (notably the establishment of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee) which will be referred to later.

When the Labour Government assumed office the changes just referred to had already come into operation. In spite of the interest he felt in the Committee of Imperial Defence, Mr Ramsay MacDonald found it impossible to assume the day-to-day direction of its affairs in addition to his work as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. On the more important occasions he presided in person, and when the question of the Channel Tunnel was under consideration he invited all the former Presidents of the Committee, irrespective of party, to attend—Lord Balfour, Lord Oxford, Mr Lloyd George and Mr Baldwin,<sup>1</sup>—an episode recalling Mr Asquith's similar invitation to Mr Balfour in 1908 and 1913. But apart from such occasions Mr MacDonald delegated the chairmanship to Lord Haldane, who had long been one of the Committee's staunchest supporters.

## 5

We may now turn to the present position <sup>2</sup> of the Committee of Imperial Defence which may be conveniently summarised under six headings :

(1) *Constitutional Position*.—The constitutional position of the Committee is the same as in 1904.

(2) *Composition*.—The nucleus of members invited to its meetings (based on the Report of Lord Salisbury's Committee) is as follows :

- The Prime Minister (Chairman).
- The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
- The Lord President of the Council.
- The Lord Privy Seal.
- The Chancellor of the Exchequer.

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Debates, vol. 675, No. 101, cols. 1784-88.

<sup>2</sup> See author's Foreword for a note on developments since 1927.

The Secretaries of State for the Colonies and Dominion Affairs.

The Secretary of State for War.

The Secretary of State for India.

The Secretary of State for Air.

The First Lord of the Admiralty.

The Chiefs of Staff of the three Fighting Services.

The Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, as Head of the Civil Service.

Other Ministers of the Crown in Great Britain or the Dominions, representatives of India or the Colonies, and other officials or persons having special qualifications, are summoned as members according to the nature of the business. Representatives of the Dominions and India attended the Committee during the recent Imperial Conference.

(3) *Secretariat*.—The Secretariat consists of a Secretary, who is also Secretary to the Cabinet—a development of constitutional practice outside my present theme—and four Assistant Secretaries, one from each of the Fighting Services and one from India. In technical matters arising on the many sub-committees the Assistant Secretaries are often supplemented by experts deputed from one of the Government Departments. Thus reinforced, the Secretariat also supplies the secretariat for all sub-committees.

(4) *The Sub-Committee Organisation*.—It would be impossible for the Committee of Imperial Defence itself to investigate in detail the whole field of defensive preparation. Imperial Defence is not a matter confined to navies, armies and air forces, but may require the whole of the resources of the Empire. Consequently, details are remitted to standing sub-committees or to sub-committees appointed *ad hoc*, operating each in a distinct sphere and reporting to the Committee of Imperial Defence in accordance with the practice that grew up before the war. Such is the interdependence of the Services and the civilian Departments that there is no permanent sub-committee which has no civilian member.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Even the Chiefs of Staff Committee has the Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence as *ex officio* Chairman.

The organisation of the Committee of Imperial Defence can conveniently be compared with that of a Service Department. The Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry have each—

- A Cabinet Minister, who presides at
- A Board or Council,
- A first professional member dealing with policy, strategy and tactics,
- A second professional member dealing with personnel,
- A third and (except in the Air Ministry) a fourth professional member dealing with different branches of construction, supply and transport.

Similarly, the Committee of Imperial Defence has—

- A Prime Minister, who presides at
- The Committee,
- A Chiefs of Staff Committee on strategical questions common to the three Services,
- A Man-power Committee on *personnel*,
- A Principal Supply Officers' Committee on joint supply questions.

Just as the Service Departments have subordinate sections dealing with all kinds of details, so the Committee of Imperial Defence has its subordinate sub-committees to co-ordinate, each within its own range of activity, both the fighting Services and the other departments concerned.

For example, working in the orbit of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the Overseas Defence Committee, started forty years ago under the title of the Colonial Defence Committee, deals with questions of Colonial Defence; the Home Defence Committee (as the old Home Ports Defence Committee is now termed) with Home Defence; on matters of principle common to both they meet as one Committee.

Similarly, the Man-power and Principal Supply Officers' Committee, each dealing with a great branch of national defensive organisation, appoint sub-committees to work out points of detail. There are also committees on all kinds of subjects, such as Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Trading and Blockade, Air Raid Precautions, Insurance against War Risks, and many other matters. There are more than fifty committees and sub-com-

mittees. The Prime Minister, in his published address to the Imperial Conference, mentioned that in the year ended the 31st March 1926, the Committee and its sub-committees were attended in the aggregate by 430 different persons, including 19 Ministers of the Crown, 6 representatives of the Overseas Empire, 142 Service officers, 157 civil servants and 48 outside experts. The scope of the work must be measured not by the size of the Secretariat, but by the co-ordinated activities of the 430 persons (many with staffs of their own), each within his own sphere making some contribution—be it great or small.

(5) *Chiefs of Staff Committee.*—The functions of the Committee of Chiefs of Staff are set forth in the following passage in the Report of Lord Salisbury's Committee :

In addition to the functions of the Chiefs of Staff as advisers on questions of sea, land or air policy respectively, to their own Board or Council, each of the three Chiefs of Staff will have an individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting, as it were, a Super-Chief of a War Staff in Commission. In carrying out this function they will meet together for the discussion of questions which affect their joint responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

This must be read in conjunction with the function of the Chairman, who is enjoined, "assisted by the three Chiefs of Staff . . . to keep the defence situation as a whole constantly under review."

In order to emphasise their responsibilities, these were embodied in a warrant, signed by the Prime Minister and furnished to each Chief of Staff.

As the Prime Minister told the Imperial Conference, one advantage of this system is that on strategical problems the Committee of Imperial Defence now receives collective advice, instead of separate and possibly contradictory advice from the three angles of sea, land and air. As he also told the Conference, the Chiefs of Staff have furnished the Government with a compre-

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 2029/24.

hensive survey of our defensive situation as a whole, based on appreciations from the Foreign Office and other Government Departments. It is significant also of the close working of the Service Departments that the strategical aspects of Imperial defence were at the Conference of 1926 dealt with by Lord Beatty, who spoke as the mouthpiece of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

(6) *The Imperial Defence College*.—Another innovation—the Imperial Defence College—is, for professional purposes, under the direction of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Each Service has its Staff College, which provides it with a corps of officers trained in the technicalities of staff work (which differ in each Service). In the same way the function of the Imperial Defence College, which only started in January 1927, is the training of a body of officers and civilian officials in the broadest aspects of Imperial strategy. Officers of the Dominions and India also attend every course.

## 6

It is generally conceded that, in the interests of efficiency no less than of economy, the complex system of modern government requires some central instrument to secure co-ordination in defence matters. France had its *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale*, Italy a corresponding body. In our case, for the reasons already given, the central organisation must be sufficiently flexible to enable the Dominions to avail themselves of it to such extent as they desire, and, even if there were not other urgent reasons, this involves an advisory status.

Secondly, I would stress the importance of frequent consultation in these matters between statesmen and servicemen. Machiavelli said that :

a prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study than war and its rules and discipline ; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli's *Prince*, chapter iv.

However applicable to an Italian State in the sixteenth century, that observation rates too high the isolated study of war in the outfit of a modern statesman. But it contains a truth. The experience of the 1914-18 war, both in this country and abroad, confirmed the experience of earlier wars, that the general direction of the war and the big decisions of policy and strategy must rest with the Government. Those decisions must be taken largely on the advice of, and in consultation with, the responsible sailors, soldiers and airmen. It is equally important that the statesmen should understand the point of view of their technical advisers, and that the professional fighting men should realise the difficulties of the statesman. In this way decisions will be reached in which both have confidence. That happy result will be the more easily achieved if they have studied defensive problems together in time of peace.

Thirdly, for the same reason it is important that there should be a corresponding close contact in peace between the fighting Services and the civilians and civil servants on whom responsibility for many vital services ancillary to operations of war falls. This can best be done by discussing these matters on equal terms round a table. In other words, the central organisation should be inter-departmental.

Fourthly, in emphasising co-ordination of the whole we must not overlook the co-ordination of the parts. The Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry has each a vast field of co-ordination on sea, land and air respectively. It is vital that in exercising its functions the central co-ordinating authority should neither tamper with nor overshadow their responsibility in this respect.

These requirements are complied with by our existing organisation. The Committee of Imperial Defence is sufficiently elastic to enable the Dominions and India to take part in discussion and preparation to the extent that each may decide. Its advice is available to every part of the Empire. Periodical Imperial Conferences afford an opportunity for discussing defence and

formulating the principles and methods of co-operation and mutual assistance.

The Committee provides for the continuous study of defence problems by Cabinet Ministers, the fighting Services and civil servants. It is inter-departmental, but it does not impair the responsibility of departments. It enables the vast store of expert and scientific knowledge outside the Government, which is so generously given, to be drawn upon. It is progressive. As the war of 1914-18 showed, it is readily adaptable to the varying circumstances of a war of any magnitude. It depends, as any system dealing with such immeasurable forces must depend, upon good team-work ; but nowadays team-work is not only the aim of the fighting Services, and, indeed, of the whole public service, but is essential, under the conditions of the modern world, to that complete grasp and clear vision of the consequences of scientific warfare which must be reckoned among the best securities for the maintenance of peace.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Although the above description of the Committee of Imperial Defence first appeared in 1927, and some embellishments were added later, especially after the beginning of rearmament in 1934, the general structure of the organisation was not changed. The experience of the war of 1939-45 provides striking confirmation of the claim in the last paragraph that the system is "readily adaptable to the varying circumstances of a war of any magnitude."

## CHAPTER V

### THE STUDY OF DISARMAMENT

#### I

It is a curious fact that, in the many discussions on disarmament after the war of 1914-18, little, if any, investigation was made of the root question whether, or within what limits, it was really desirable, either as a general proposition or from the point of view of the British Empire in particular. The blessings of disarmament were, for the most part, assumed as a self-evident proposition.

Perhaps this state of mind was due mainly to reaction from the war. In the 1914-18 war, as in other wars, the country passed through three stages. The first stage was one which may be described as "never again." Soon after the outbreak of that war, as in the case of wars in the past, there was considerable public outcry against our lack of preparedness. In Parliament, in the Press and even in the pulpit, responsible people inveighed against the lack of foresight of the Government. Never again were we to be found so unprepared. The very considerable preparations that had been made were overlooked.

After the "never again" stage the nation settled down to the second stage and set its teeth to win the war, cost what it might.

The third stage was one of war weariness. The war had now become a "war to end war." The "never again" of unpreparedness was forgotten and supplanted by "never again" applied to war. Just as the Napoleonic wars were followed by the idealistic but unpractical plan of a Holy Alliance, so the 1914-18 war had as its sequel the foundation of the more elaborate scheme of a League of Nations with a permanent constitution and staff.

Among the provisions of the Covenant, which occupied the largest amount of energy and time, though with scant success, was Article VIII, providing for a reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety. This tremendous obligation was entered on without any real study of the more fundamental questions of the desirability of disarmament.

## 2

If anyone were to undertake an exhaustive inquiry into the question of disarmament he would perhaps begin by asking what was the condition of primitive mankind in this respect. Whether he took the case of mankind in the Stone Age, of cave-dwellers, or of lake-dwellers, he would find that, as soon as they became sufficiently advanced to live in groups or tribes, the best of the manhood became the defenders of the remainder. That this custom survived among primitive peoples until quite recently is shown by an observation in the Report of Mr Ormsby-Gore's East African Commission, to the effect that, before the arrival of the white man, the manhood of the Bantu tribe from eighteen to thirty were "kept primarily as a military force." In a word, armaments arrive at a very early stage of civilisation.

The inquirer might then seek enlightenment as to the part played by armaments in the development from a primitive state of the great civilisations of the past. Broadly he would find that all through history the advance of civilisation had proceeded side by side with war and conquest. Even the arts and literature seem to have flourished, in the main, in and immediately after eras of war and conquest, from which to a considerable extent they derived their inspiration. In long periods of peace they sometimes degenerated. When he came to investigate the place of armament and disarmament in the decline of great Empires, the inquirer's task would become difficult owing to the multifarious causes of such decline. He would find it ascribed in some cases to the mistakes of

autocrats or oligarchies, in others to the folly of democracies. In some instances it would be attributed to the decay of agriculture, but the investigator would be baffled to establish whether this was due to a faulty system of land-ownership, over-taxation, competition of cheap imports, or some more subtle cause such as exhaustion of the soil. Malaria and other forms of disease, shortage of precious metals, and the excess of religious enthusiasm would also be found to have played a part in the decline of civilisations.

Undoubtedly, however, the investigator would find that armaments and disarmament had been prominent; in some cases because armaments were increased beyond the financial capacity of the State, in others because they were too small and the nation was overwhelmed. Sometimes armaments took the wrong form. Neglect of sea-power was a frequent cause of disaster. Sometimes the safety of the fleet's base was insufficiently provided for, e.g., when Alexander the Great destroyed the sea-power of Persia by marching down the coasts of Syria and Egypt and capturing the fleet's bases; a result, however, which Hannibal failed to achieve in his march to Italy.

There is one factor which would be found to be present in the decay of most of the early Empires, namely, decline of the military spirit. There is evidence of this in the case of the Empires of Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Carthage and Rome. On the other hand, cases could be quoted where an over-development of the military spirit had brought disaster, for example, to France under Napoleon, and to Germany in the present century.

An investigation on these lines would also probably show that few, if any, civilisations have been able to withstand a prolonged period of peace without degeneracy, often followed by collapse. In short, just as the military spirit appears at an early stage of civilisation, and thrives during its development, so its disappearance is a precursor or an accompaniment of degeneracy, though the dividing line of cause and effect in this matter is difficult to determine.

There is one period in history of exceptional interest from the point of view of disarmament, namely, the first two centuries of the Christian era, when the civilised world, under the hegemony of Rome, was united into a single nation.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to press too closely the analogy between the Roman Empire and the League of Nations. In the former case the union of the civilised nations was achieved by conquest. The States which composed it, though given a wide measure of autonomy in local affairs, were not permitted to conduct separate foreign policies nor to maintain separate armies. Nor, as nations, could they exercise much weight in the councils of the Emperor, though as citizens of the Roman Empire the peoples were permitted to rise to the highest posts, and some of the most successful Emperors were in fact natives of the provinces.<sup>1</sup> Rome, however, remained a super-State in which was concentrated the main direction of the civilised world. From the point of view of disarmament, these fundamental differences between the ancient and the modern systems are not of great importance. The civilised nations of the world were in fact combined ultimately into a single nation. By these means peace was achieved between them for two hundred years. Both naval and military disarmament were carried to great lengths. These, and many other of the ideals to which we now aspire, were put into operation and tried out in exceptionally favourable conditions. The results, therefore, are deserving of study.

The policy of the Roman Emperors from the time of Augustus onward was to civilise the nations under their sway and to absorb them into a single nation. The great Mediterranean world under the control of Rome now entered upon a new age of prosperity and development unknown before, when the nations along its shores were still fighting each other in war after war. A process of unification began which was to make the Mediterranean world a Mediterranean nation. (*Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Breasted. Chapter xxvii, section 87.)

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<sup>1</sup> The Emperors Trajan and Hadrian, for example, were both Spaniards.

This was accomplished partly by a gradual extension to the provinces of the privilege of Roman citizenship.

Whole provinces, especially in the West, had been granted citizenship, or a modified form of it, by the Emperors. Influential citizens in the provinces were often given high rank and office at Rome. As a result there had now grown up a Mediterranean nation, as we have seen it foreshadowed even in the time of Augustus, and Italy dropped to a level with the provinces. (*Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Breasted. Chapter xxviii, entitled "The Second Century of Peace.")

The process was furthered by the extension to the provinces of the system of Roman laws :

These laws did much to unify the peoples of the Mediterranean world into a single nation ; for they were now regarded by the law not as different nations but as subjects of the same great State, which extended to them all the same protection of justice, law and order. (*Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxviii.)

The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Chapter i.)

In the year A.D. 211 the Emperor Caracalla extended the citizenship to all nations of the Roman world.

Annihilating distinctions of legal status among freemen, it completed the work which trade and literature and toleration to all beliefs but one were already performing, and left, so far as we can tell, only one nation still cherishing a national feeling. (Bryce. *Holy Roman Empire*. Chapter ii.)

Thus the huge Roman Empire, with a population estimated by Gibbon at 120,000,000, by Breasted at from 65,000,000 to 100,000,000 and embracing all the nations of the civilised world, was united in a close-knit combination of nations which became a single nation. The city States comprising this League or Empire were largely autonomous, though subject to the Roman Governor of the Province, who was himself subject to the Emperor. Even the difficulties of language were to a great extent overcome.

The language of Virgil and Cicero, though with some inevitable mixture of corruption, was so universally adopted in Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain,

and Pannonia, that the faint traces of the Punic idioms were preserved only in the mountains or among the peasants. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*. Chapter ii.)

The language of civilised intercourse in all the West was Latin, the language of Rome, whereas East of Sicily the traveller heard only Greek. (Breasted. *Ancient Times*. Chapter xxviii.)

This union of nations, this fusion of races, this “notion of a single nationality” as Bryce calls it, brought with it an almost complete era of peace. There were a few frontier campaigns, the defeat of Varus in A.D. 9, the conquest of Britain, the German wars, the campaign culminating in the siege of Jerusalem, the conquest of Dacia by the Emperor Trajan, and his inconclusive war against the Parthians ; but apart from such frontier wars and some civil disturbances, there was an era of almost unbroken peace from 30 B.C. until about A.D. 167. During these two centuries the Roman Empire achieved peace between the nations of the civilised world. In the words of St Augustine :

*Condita est civitas Roma per quam Deo placuit orbem debellare terrarum et in unam societatem reipublicae legumque longe lateque pacare.* (De Civitate Dei. xviii. 22.)

Moreover, this state of peace was part of a deliberate policy, of which the Roman Empire was conscious. An altar of peace was set up by the Senate in the time of Augustus, and a Forum of Peace by the Emperor Vespasian, about the end of the first century of peace (A.D. 70). In consequence a large measure of disarmament was carried out :

The distant clash of war from the Rhine or Euphrates was hardly heard or heeded in the profound calm of the Mediterranean coasts, *where, after the extinction of piracy, fleets had ceased to be maintained.* No quarrels of race or religion disturbed that calm, for all national distinctions were becoming merged in the idea of a common Empire. (Bryce. *Holy Roman Empire*. Chapter ii.)

Disarmament, however, was not by any means confined to the fleets in the Mediterranean. The number and size of the

legions was cut down, until, towards the end of the second century of peace (in the time of the Emperor Septimius Severus),

called out only occasionally for drill or to repel a barbarian raid, they soon lost all discipline, became merely feeble militia, called by the Roman Government "frontiersmen." (Breasted. *Ancient Times*. Chapter xxix.)

Gradually the legions of Rome came to be recruited almost entirely from the semi-civilised frontier races, and the heart of the Roman League of Nations became almost completely demilitarised.

This was found even more convenient by the hirer than the hired ; till by degrees barbarian mercenaries came to form the largest, and certainly the most efficient, part of the Roman armies . . . the practice could not but increase with the extinction of the free peasantry, the growth of villainage and the effeminacy of all classes. . . . The soldiers of the Eastern Empire in the time of Arcadius are almost all Goths . . . (Bryce. *Holy Roman Empire*. Chapter iii.)

Towards the end of the second century A.D., owing to the rebellion of a provincial Governor, Marcus Aurelius was obliged to re-create a standing army in Italy.

These legions had become much smaller, and they were made up increasingly of barbarians, especially Germans and the uncivilised natives of the northern Balkans, among whom the Illyrians took the lead. The Roman citizen was now a rarity in the ranks, and it soon became necessary to allow the barbarians to fight in their own massed formations, to which they were accustomed. The discipline of the legion, and the legion itself, disappeared, and with it the superior military power of Rome was gone. The native ferocity and reckless bravery of uncivilised hordes, before which the un-military Roman townsmen trembled, were now the power upon which the Empire relied for its protection. (Breasted. *Ancient Times*. Chapter xxix.)

And what was the result of this long era of peace and disarmament ? In the words of Breasted :

good government, fine buildings, education, and other evidences of civilisation more widespread in the second century of peace than ever before.

Or, as Lord Balfour puts it :

In so far as Rome inherited what Alexander conquered, it carried out the ideal which Alexander had conceived. In few periods have the rich been

readier to spend their private fortunes on public objects. There never was a community in which associations for every purpose of mutual aid or enjoyment sprang more readily into existence. There never was an age in which there was a more rapid advance in humanitarian ideals, or a more anxious seeking after spiritual truth. Education was well endowed, and its professors held in high esteem. Physical culture was cared for. Law was becoming scientific. Research was not forgotten. What more could be reasonably expected? (Lord Balfour. "Sidgwick Memorial Lecture on Decadence," Cambridge, 1908).

But all these evidences of civilisation were accompanied by what Gibbon calls "a decline of genius" :

but if we except the inimitable Lucian, this age of indolence passed away without having produced a single writer of original genius, or who excelled in the arts of elegant composition. . . . The name of poet was almost forgotten ; and that of orator was usurped by sophists. A crowd of critics, of commentators, darkened the face of learning, and the decline of genius was soon followed by the corruption of taste. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*. Chapter ii.)

There was now a larger educated public at Rome than ever before, and the splendid libraries maintained by the State were open to all. Authors and literary men were also liberally supported by the Emperors. Nevertheless, even under these favourable circumstances, not a single genius of great creative imagination arose. Just as in sculpture and painting, so now in literature, the leaders were content to imitate or copy the great works of the past. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxviii.)

In science the Romans continued to be collectors of knowledge gained by the Greeks. . . . Thus men fell into an indolent attitude of mind and were satisfied to learn merely what earlier discoverers had found out. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxviii.)

In spite of outward prosperity, especially suggested by the magnificent buildings of the Empire, Mediterranean civilisation was declining in the second century of peace. The decline became noticeable in the reign of Hadrian. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxviii.)

Degeneracy, which had already existed in Rome before the days of the Empire, was not only accentuated in the capital city of the Empire, with its 1,200,000 inhabitants, but spread also to other great cities. Both the symptoms of decay and the measures adopted to counter them were ominously suggestive of modern tendencies.

Divorce increased. Agriculture, long stagnant, continued to decline, owing partly to the cessation of the supply of slaves hitherto furnished by victorious warfare, partly to the competition of cheap imported wheat, and to various other causes, including exhaustion of soil. Grants of land and State credit to ex-Service men failed to keep the rural population on the land. The demand for the manufactures of the towns was reduced. Trade and industry and the financial and business life of the cities languished. In Italy there were few recruits for the army, but there was an army of unemployed.

There were free circus displays, cheap public baths, and doles in the form of bread, meat, even wine tickets—a symptom of degeneracy which had already appeared in the days of the Consuls.

Debased by the life of the city, the former sturdy yeoman lost his independence in an eager scramble for a place in the waiting line of city poor, to whom the government distributed free grain, wine and meat. The time which should have been spent in breadwinning was worse than wasted among the cheering multitudes at the chariot races, bloody games, and barbarous spectacles.

Notwithstanding the fine families who moved to Rome from the provinces under the liberal Emperors of the second century A.D., the city became a great hive of shiftless population supported by the State, with money which the struggling agriculturist was taxed to provide. The same situation was in the main to be found in all the leading cities. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxix.)

This diminutive stature of mankind, if we pursue the metaphor, was daily sinking below the old standard, and the Roman world was indeed peopled by a race of pygmies; when the fierce giants of the north broke in, and mended the puny breed. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*. Chapter ii.)

To claim that this degeneracy was due solely to an era of peace and disarmament would be, of course, to claim too much. There were many other causes at work, some of which have already been mentioned. The whole subject was discussed by Lord Balfour in his Sidgwick Memorial Lecture on Decadence at Cambridge in 1908. But writers with so different a point of view as Gibbon and Bryce, concur in giving a place in the collapse of Rome before the

barbarians ("despising the degenerate provincials, who struck no blow in their own defence"—Bryce, Chapter III) to the loss of military spirit in the peoples of Italy and to the levelling effect of the policy of unification.

It was scarcely possible that the eyes of contemporaries should discover in the public felicity the latest causes of decay and corruption. This long peace, and the uniform government of the Romans, introduced a slow and secret poison into the vitals of the empire, the minds of men were gradually reduced to the same level, *and even the military spirit evaporated*. The natives of Europe were brave and robust. Spain, Gaul, Britain and Illyricum supplied the legions with excellent soldiers, and constituted the real strength of the monarchy. Their personal valour remained, but they no longer possessed that public courage which is nourished by the love of independence, the sense of national honour, the presence of danger, and the habit of command. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*. Chapter ii.)

The Empire of Rome was firmly established by the singular and perfect coalition of its members. The subject nations, resigning the hope and even the wish of independence, embraced the character of Roman citizens ; and the provinces of the west were reluctantly torn by the barbarians from the bosom of their mother country. But this union was purchased by the loss of national freedom and *military spirit*. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*. Chapter xxxviii.)

The Empire of the elder Rome had been splendid in its life, yet its judgment was written in the misery to which it had brought the provinces, *and the helplessness that had invited the attacks of the barbarians*. (Bryce. *Holy Roman Empire*. Chapter vii.)

The naval disarmament in the Mediterranean, already referred to, brought its natural reward :

In the East, the Goths, one of the strongest of the German tribes, took to the water, and their fleet passed out of the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. While they devastated the coast cities far and wide, other bands pushed down through the Balkan Peninsula and laid waste Greece as far as the Peloponnese. Even Athens was plundered. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxix.)

The results of military disarmament are almost too well known to require repetition :

Life and property were nowhere safe ; turbulence, robbery and murder were everywhere. . . . In this tempest of anarchy during the third century

A.D. the civilisation of the ancient world suffered final collapse. The supremacy of mind and of scientific knowledge won by the Greeks in the third century B.C. yielded to the reign of ignorance and superstition in these social disasters of the third century A.D. . . . The barbarians penetrated far into Italy. In the West they overran Gaul and Spain, and some of them even crossed to Africa. In Gaul they burned city after city, and their leaders stood by and laughed in exultation as they saw the flames devour the beautiful buildings of the Roman cities. . . . (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxix.)

During the century of revolution after the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Roman army organisation had gone to pieces and the barbarians raided the lands of the Empire without hindrance. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxx.)

The highly organised western Roman Empire, however, did not go down without a struggle. There were many alternations of victory and defeat before the end was reached, the continued decay of agriculture, the growth of oppressive taxation, of officialdom and crude socialistic experiment until—

Even the citizen's wages and the prices of the goods he bought and sold were as far as possible fixed for him by the State. The emperor's innumerable officials kept an eye upon even the humblest citizen. They watched the grain dealers, butchers and bakers, and saw to it that they properly supplied the public and never deserted their occupation. In some cases the State even forced the son to follow the profession of the father. In a word, the Roman Government now attempted to regulate almost every interest in life, and wherever the citizen turned he felt the control and oppression of the State. (Breasted. *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*. Chapter xxix.)

Never, however, even in the days of ephemeral military success, did Rome succeed in re-creating the old army composed mainly of Italians. In A.D. 410 Rome was sacked by the Western Goths under Alaric, and soon after by the Goths, and again by the Gauls. A few years after the Empire had dwindled to Italy itself, "and even then the emperor of the West was entirely in the hands of his German officials and commanders." (Breasted. *Ancient Times*, Chapter XXX.) In A.D. 476 the last of the Western Emperors disappeared.

Roman civilisation was so potent a force that it eventually conquered the very nations that conquered Rome, just as in an

earlier era Greek civilisation had conquered Rome, who had conquered Greece in arms. This result, not realised until long after, can have given no comfort to those nations which, trusting to the superiority of their civilisation and neglecting their armaments, found their country overrun time after time by the barbarians of the north. Even to-day, like Gibbon in 1787 in his comments on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West :

we may enquire, with anxious curiosity, whether Europe is still threatened with a repetition of those calamities which formerly oppressed the arms and institutions of Rome. (Gibbon. *Decline and Fall*. Chapter xxxviii.)

## 4

Leaving these broader considerations, which apply more or less to disarmament as affecting all European nations, it may be useful to consider whether disarmament was of advantage to the British Empire after the war of 1914-18. As an Empire we greatly reduced our armaments. We saw the benefits in the improvement in our credit and reduction in taxation, advantages not lightly to be set aside. Even from the point of view of Imperial defence it can be argued that our first task was to re-establish the sinews of war which provided such an important element in the victory of the Allies in the 1914-18 war.

There was, however, another side to the picture. The process was carried out too fast and too far. Probably some part of the subsequent decline of trade and employment was due to this cause.

The causes of unemployment are too numerous and too complex for detailed examination. They are bound up with such matters as wages, hours of labour, the standard of living, prices, exchanges, debts, taxation, and what not. In some of our great industries the causes were comparatively simple, e.g., in the cotton, lace and shipbuilding industries. But, of all our industries, the one from which the most depressing reports were received was the heavy steel and iron industry.

Whenever a few cruisers were ordered, and once especially

when two capital ships were laid down, a sigh of relief went up from all those concerned with unemployment. This suggests that some enlightenment could be obtained by ascertaining what was the effect on the steel and iron trades of the drastic measures of disarmament that were adopted after the end of the war.

At the beginning of August 1914, there were building or ordered in the United Kingdom, either for British or foreign account, no fewer than 111 warships of different categories. Of these 22 were on foreign account. The corresponding figures for August 1924, were 25 on order, of which one gunboat (for Siam) was on foreign account. The figures for 1914 included 20 capital ships, of which 4 were for foreign account. The corresponding figure for 1925 was 2 capital ships.

Is it not possible, and even probable, that part of our difficulties was due to the lack of orders for warships? The money spent in this direction must have gone some distance to pay the overhead charges not only of the armament firms but of all the ancillary firms with whom they placed orders, whether for raw material and its transport, for fuel, or for technical material such as machinery, electrical equipment, and so forth. In short, the orders were tantamount to a subsidy to the heavy industry, a subsidy which, it should be noted, was paid to the extent of about one-fifth by the foreign countries whom we were supplying with war material. All this was exclusive of orders for equipment and armaments for our own and foreign armies.

Is it not probable that the assistance which the heavy industry received from these orders was one of the factors which enabled us to compete on favourable terms with foreign countries where the standard of living, the rate of wages, and consequently the working costs were less? In other words, the loss of these orders, coming at a time when wages and cost of living were high and taxation was far greater than before the war, must have proved a handicap to our heavy industry, the value of which it is difficult to gauge.

If this be true, the ideal of limitation of armaments, which was pressed so vigorously by British enthusiasts, may have been a contributory cause of one of our most serious national embarrassments.

There is no attempt here to argue that armaments are *economic-ally* desirable. It is desired rather to suggest that too rapid a limitation of armaments must inevitably have a disturbing effect upon essential industry, which echoes throughout the whole fabric of commerce and transportation. Like all sudden steps, it produces reactions that are hard to control. Moreover, no nation suffers more severely from this process than one such as our own, which in the past has been to a great extent the arsenal of the smaller nations.

There are other considerations connected with the effects of disarmament which it might be of interest to follow up in deciding whether, on the whole, its rapid pursuit was an unmixed advantage. It would seem, for example, that the zeal shown in this direction reacted on the supply of manpower to the fighting Services. No longer did the flower of our youth flock, as it did before the 1914-18 war, to become officers of Services which were exposed to the full brunt of the League of Nations' axe. The same was true to some extent of the rank and file. Just as we are prone to wonder at the spectacle of the camps of the Roman armies filled by barbarians at a time when the Italian cities were crowded with men "on the dole," so the historians of the future may be puzzled at the phenomenon of an army (in all respects better paid and better found than in the past) which could not complete its ranks at a time when one million males were receiving unemployment benefit.

We need not be deterred from pursuing our ideals by the failure of our predecessors. But we can learn from their mistakes.

It would be presumptuous to attempt to draw hard and fast conclusions from what is but a superficial study of a limited portion

of the world's history, or from a conspectus of only one or two of the innumerable factors bearing on this complex problem. It is not safe to attempt more than to indicate the general trend to which this introduction to the study of disarmament points.

First and foremost is the importance of a proper balance in the maintenance of the military spirit. It must not be pushed so far as to develop an aggressive spirit. But it is vital that it should not be allowed to disappear, for it is difficult to re-create. Under an international system and in a long era of peace the military spirit is exposed to exceptional dangers. This is especially the case if internationalism takes the form of a super-State, reducing its component parts to a dead level with a loss of national consciousness. It is an interesting speculation as to whether this would have resulted from the creation of the United States of Europe, as advocated by M. Herriot in his speech on the Geneva Protocol, amid the plaudits of the French Chamber, as the goal of the League of Nations. In an international no less than in a national system it is essential to adjust armaments according to the dangers which threaten. Not only is it necessary to provide adequately for the fulfilment of international commitments, but also to look further afield and to provide against dangers from outside the system which at the moment might seem negligible. It would be easy to underrate the future potentialities of States still in the throes of after-birth of a new social system. It is easy to lull the nations into a false sense of security, each relying on a support from its neighbour which may not be forthcoming when the crisis comes. It is easy, in a long period of peace, to dull the consciousness of nationality, in which alone the military spirit can survive. The symptoms of degeneracy manifest themselves so gradually that at any given moment they are not easy to discern. Even in the field of economics rapid disarmament would seem to have its dangers. In the pursuit of disarmament, therefore, the whole matter would appear to be summed up in the Italian proverb : "*Chi va sano, va piano, chi va piano va lontano.*" (He who goes wisely goes slow ; he who goes slow goes far.)

## CHAPTER VI

### INTERNATIONAL FORCES

#### I

AFTER the war of 1939-45 the Allies found themselves confronted with prodigious responsibilities, and on a still larger scale than in 1918. The whole of Europe, enemy and occupied countries alike, was in a state bordering on chaos—short of food and supplies of all kinds ; transport in confusion ; enormous building programmes to make good the unprecedented ravages of the war ; few if any stable governments, and many political rivalries. Populations are dispersed, having either been driven into slavery or forcibly recruited to serve the insatiable needs of the Nazis' war effort ; and there are a number of territorial, strategic, racial and economic problems to settle that have so far baffled the wit of man.

For a considerable time it will be necessary to maintain armies of occupation in many lands, as after the 1914-18 war but on a much larger scale. Armies of occupation are, however, only a temporary expedient and not a satisfactory one. Napoleon's occupation of Germany after Jena for six years did not prevent the re-creation of a Prussian army. Wellington's international army of occupation of France after Waterloo encountered considerable difficulties and was withdrawn with relief in 1818. The long international occupation of the Rhineland after 1918 is not an episode that anyone remembers with much pride or satisfaction, though the good-humoured British soldier made friends with the Rhinelanders and sometimes married their daughters.

Clearly in due course some more permanent system for maintaining international order must be evolved, and the Foreign

Ministers of the four nations (United Kingdom, U.S.A., Russia and China) at the Moscow Conference announced on 1st November 1944 :

That they recognise the necessity of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organisation, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all the peace-loving States and open to membership by all such States, large or small, for the maintenance of international peace and security.

That sounds very like the League of Nations and, in any event, like the League this general international organisation will have to envisage the use of force in the last resort. It is with the nature of such forces that we are concerned in this chapter.

Certain fundamentals can be stated at the outset :

- (1) The forces must be capable of operating in any part of the world and will therefore require fleets and ample shipping transport with secure bases and docks, repair facilities, and ample fuel facilities and supplies over the Seven Seas.
- (2) Air forces are essential nowadays to every belligerent operation by land or sea, and have besides an immense but so far not decisive effect by themselves. Air forces also require secure aerodromes covered by land forces and furnished with supplies of all kinds, including especially aviation fuels and bombs.
- (3) All three arms require ample resources, including raw materials, for manufacture of war material in great variety, as well as trained reserves and unlimited manpower to draw on in case of war.

These three fundamentals have an important bearing on the question of whether the International Force at the disposal of the general international organisation is to be a permanent International Force with its own distinctive uniform recruited and maintained solely as such, or an assembly of the national forces of the constituent States.

The answer is not in doubt. It is inconceivable that the vast machinery of a modern force, capable of operating all over the world, could be maintained on an international basis. That could only be done if the nations were fused into a single nation like the Roman Empire, and there is not the remotest prospect of that within the lifetime of the present generation. We are therefore driven back on some system for combining the separate forces of the "peace-loving" nations.

That International Forces can work together successfully has been shown again and again. The Allies worked together not too badly in the war of 1914-18, and the same is true of the recent war, but that was partly due to the common language of America and ourselves, between whom the closest co-operation is absolutely essential, and by the fact that Russia, the third great military buttress of the Alliance, had a perfectly separate problem, which was solved brilliantly.

A system which can be made to work under the pressure of actual war or danger, however, is much harder to maintain after the danger is past, and usually sinks into inefficiency. That is one of the difficulties that has to be overcome. The best method of building up an effective system is to start from something that exists to-day, namely, the combined strength of the United Nations. At the end of the war the hope was that their co-operation would continue as satisfactorily as before, and that the forces of the British Empire, the United States and Russia would dominate Europe and the world. Alongside these would be smaller forces, sometimes no more than token forces from the other United Nations, all of which would be dependent for war material and supplies on the "Big Three." Now that the fighting is over, and the European pot has ceased to boil, these forces will be gradually demobilised—gradually, because demobilisation can only take place as the world settles down, and, as we found after the 1914-18 war, that is a very slow and difficult process, which may take several years to complete.

The forces of the three Great Powers and of the other United Nations grouped round them each has a geographical area of occupation assigned to it, as in the Rhineland after the armistice of 1918. An inter-allied European Commission, the embryo of which was born at the Moscow Conference of November 1944 is responsible for co-ordinating their action.

There will presumably be a peace treaty : there must be one, because theoretically a state of war exists during an armistice until a treaty is signed. Even after its signature and ratification, however, there are likely to be many loose ends left over, as after the Treaty of Versailles, such as obligations to be fulfilled by the enemy, the completion of disarmament, rounding up of war criminals, plebiscites, boundary commissions, exchanges of population and so forth, and international garrisons may have to be maintained here and there for a long time. Behind those international garrisons of military forces will be air forces, complete masters of the air, demonstrating to the subjugated populations by their ubiquity, by their presence in the skies and the very roar of their engines, the impossibility of any fresh rising. And behind them again will be the allied navies in control of the Seven Seas. But the burden of maintaining order locally will rest with the armies.

During the whole of that stage there should be no insuperable difficulty, provided that the three pivotal Powers of the United Nations remain united in the solution of the innumerable problems that confront them.<sup>1</sup> That, however, is an interim period. We must here look still further ahead to a time when Europe has settled down sufficiently to enable the standing garrisons and armies of occupation to be withdrawn, and the world approaches to the normal, and some permanent organisation has been set up. Only then will the testing-time begin.

<sup>1</sup> The anticipations in these paragraphs have since proved correct. Unfortunately the essential condition of the unity of the three pivotal powers is proving very difficult to maintain.

Only once in the history of the world has that problem of permanent peace been satisfactorily solved, even for a time. That was in the days of the Roman Empire, as I have already described in Chapter V.

After the Roman Empire was overrun by a succession of German and other barbarians, all efforts to re-create its unifying influence, the memory of which lived down the centuries, failed—and they failed largely on the question we are considering here, the difficulties of International Forces.

The failure of that later attempt at world co-ordination known as the Holy Roman Empire was so great that, in spite of its elaborate imperial machinery, money contributions, military quotas, councils and diets, I shall not spend time upon it.

The attempt to establish peace in Europe after the downfall of Napoleon by an alliance of the four Powers that had won the war—Russia, Austria, Prussia and Great Britain—is interesting because it has some resemblance to the post-war situation that we are now considering. The Quadruple Alliance did not last long. Great Britain, finding it impossible to acquiesce in the desire of the continental autocrats to use the pact for the suppression of Liberal movements in Europe, was the first to quit. The system was detested by the smaller States—as any attempt by the Great Powers to rule the roost always will be—and within ten years of Waterloo the Quadruple Alliance was virtually at an end.

Of all the attempts to stop war or nip it in the bud perhaps the most tragic failure was that of the League of Nations, which, for all the high ideals of its authors, and the misplaced public confidence that it inspired for a time, achieved no more than a few minor successes, and never once succeeded in mustering an International Force against any of the aggressor States in the troubles that broke out in every continent between the two great wars. Indeed there could be no object in mustering them, for the

simple reason that there was never sufficient agreement in the Council or Assembly of the League to control them effectively. Like the Holy Roman Empire it lacked the first essential of successful co-operation and of control of International Forces—the whole-hearted agreement of the participating States. Such whole-hearted agreement is the key problem in this difficult question. Any disagreement or half-heartedness is at once reflected in the national contingents. Suspicion at the best, discord and fighting at the worst are engendered, and the International Force becomes unreliable.

International Forces will succeed best—perhaps, indeed, they can only succeed—under some over-mastering motive force. Perhaps the best example of this is afforded by the Crusades. The first Crusade of 1096, in spite of complete absence of organisation and ignorance of the geography, climate or population of the countries through which they proposed to travel, *succeeded* owing to the exalted emotional enthusiasm of the chivalry of Western Europe as it took up the Cross in response to the Pope's appeal, and its success was favoured by the dissensions of the Moslem emirs. On the other hand, the later Crusades failed largely owing to the profound estrangement and inveterate animosity of the two halves of the Christian world, quickened by ambition and economic rapacity; their failure was also due partly to the combination of their adversaries under three successive, capable Moslem leaders.

That principle holds through the history of the ages. So long as some predominating motive was to be found, international armies could co-operate effectively. It is strongly supported by the events that led to the downfall of Napoleon, by the experiences of the 1914-18 war, and of the recent war, in all of which there was an overmastering motive—the determination to save the world from the tyranny of a single nation. The foundation, therefore, of the success of any attempt to maintain peace by international forces in the last resort must be an over-mastering basic

consciousness among the peace-loving nations of the vital necessity for unity.

To maintain that consciousness is the key problem. It is beset by many difficulties.

First, there is the difficulty of maintaining unity among the greater Powers, on which fall in the last resort the maintenance of the bulk of the armed forces. Each of them has its own outlook, and these may not always coincide, as we have already seen in the failure of the Quadruple Alliance after Waterloo. Each has its internal problems and politics, which may result in a rapid change in national outlook, such as led to the withdrawal of the United States of America from the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, removing the keystone of the arch. Future success will depend essentially on the ability of the peoples of the United Kingdom, the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. (the three "U's") to add one more "U," Unity, and to maintain the forces necessary to deter aggression.

Beyond the large nations are the smaller peace-loving nations, which have their place on the basis of sovereign equality in the international organisation. The smaller nations are very important. The *causes* of many wars are differences between the larger Powers, but the *pretexts* often arise from the circumstances of the smaller States. The cause of the 1914-18 war and of the 1939-45 war was German ambition. The *pretext* of the former war was a dispute between Austria and Serbia, to whom Russia was linked by ties of race and religion, and of the latter the determination of the Nazis to recover territory from Poland. Again, how many major wars in a remote past have been precipitated by the affairs of Spain or the Netherlands or the Balkans? Moreover, many of the smaller States have problems of extraordinary complexity between themselves, usually arising out of minority populations, but often complicated by economic and strategical considerations of a mutually contradictory character. Each nation sticks to its claims with extraordinary tenacity, and it is almost impossible for its

government to yield except to overwhelming force. When a change is effected it merely removes an irredentist movement from one side of the boundary to the other. And, as already pointed out, different Great Powers are apt to have each its own historic or other affinities with smaller Powers, which lead to conflict between them.

The small nations, quite naturally, are extremely tenacious of the principle of "sovereign equality." At the League of Nations they would combine for that as for nothing else, and their encroachments into the Council gradually reduced that body to impotency.

Another supreme difficulty in securing unity of action is the question of whether decisions are to be taken by unanimity or by a majority. If by unanimity only, then the veto of a single Power can stop action. If by majority, a free nation could be compelled to go to war against its consent, and under that plan there is the danger of the nations dividing into two camps and precipitating another world war. There might be some arrangement under which nations unwilling to impose sanctions could remain neutral—but that might be very dangerous because neutrality can take many forms, as we have seen in the recent wars.

Yet another difficulty is to impose sanctions on one's friends. Japan and Italy had been our Allies in the 1914-18 war, and before that we had a long tradition of friendship with both countries. That was a real difficulty when the Japanese transgressed the Covenant in Manchuria and afterwards China, and the Italians in Abyssinia, the more so in the case of Japan because no country or combination of countries was ready to undertake pressure that might lead to so great a war, and in the case of Italy, because that country was still relied on at that time, especially by France, as an important element in holding Germany in check. Moreover, those events resulted in these two Great Powers ceasing to be counted as peace-loving nations. That is another trouble, namely, that every time a nation breaks the rules, and is subjected to pressure

of some kind, it usually ceases to be a member of the general international organisation, and the dissident states are apt to drift together as did Germany, Italy and Japan.

These difficulties can only be overcome by a combination of great wisdom and a willingness of all the nations concerned to make concessions to the cause of peace, to make sacrifices, and if necessary to take their share in the application of pressure on a recalcitrant State.

It is rather strange that the régime of the so-called "Concert of Europe," the system of Balance of Power, sometimes called less politely the Era of Anarchy, which grew up in the last century, after the collapse of the Quadruple Alliance, was fairly successful in either preventing wars or ringing them round. Indeed the thirty-three years of peace in Europe between the Congress of Berlin (1878) and the Turco-Italian war (1911) have been described as "unexampled since the age of the Antonines" (Alison Phillips). Admittedly it was an armed peace—"unquiet, apprehensive," punctuated by wars in Asia, Africa and America, and culminating in the war of 1914-18. Yet it does suggest that the right organisation, if less haphazard than the Concert of Europe, should be less rigid than the Covenant of the League of Nations.

## 3

If the difficulties can be overcome, and unity can be preserved, the technical problems of International Forces, though by no means negligible, should not be insoluble. There would have to be a permanent Combined Staff for planning the organisation. Operational planning, however, in a long-term sense would be out of the question. It is unimaginable, for example, that the General Staff of an International Organisation composed of members of the Constituent States could plan operations against any member of the peace-loving group. They could, of course, plan against

a nation that had broken away, as Germany, Japan and Italy broke from the League of Nations, and that is the way in which it would work out in practice. Their secrets, it is to be feared, will leak. There is not a very high code of secrecy in international organisations.

In former days the command of International Forces presented a great difficulty. In 1734, for example, a great difficulty arose in the army of the Holy Roman Empire about the Command in the Rhineland against France, for which there were two Protestant and two Catholic aspirants from the member States. This is how Thomas Carlyle describes it :

The Reich was in very great affliction about this preliminary matter. But Friedrich-Wilhelm steps in with a healing recipe : " Let there be four Reichs—Feldmarschalls " said Friedrich Wilhelm ; " two Protestant and two Catholic : won't that do ? " Excellent ! answers the Reich : and there are Four Feldmarschalls for the time being ; no lack of commanders to the Reich's Army.<sup>1</sup>

They took it in turn to command, and their campaign could hardly have been more ineffective.

Many similar examples could be given. Even in the 1914-18 war there was no allied Commander-in-Chief on the Western Front until we were on the verge of disaster, when Marshal Foch was at last appointed General-in-Chief. Even then Belgium was not included, and Italy hesitated long before accepting the extension of his command to that theatre, and then only conditionally. In the 1939-45 war, however, the difficulties were surmounted, and perhaps they will not prove so formidable in future.

The main difficulties, both before and during an international war, however, as already shown, are always political. Participation in war is the most serious decision a Government and a nation ever have to take, especially if it is in someone else's quarrel. Public opinion may be opposed or divided. The country may feel bound

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle : *Frederick the Great*, book ix, chapter x.

to reserve its resources for some emergency threatening from another quarter. It may like Poland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, be so near the enemy's country as to be over-run before help can come. It may be in the throes of some internal upheaval, such as a general strike or even a civil war. It may be on the verge of a general election or Presidential election in circumstances that make an immediate decision impossible.

It is not so much the technical as the political difficulties that hamper every scheme for the international organisation of peace by the use of armed forces. For a time, while the memories of the recent war persist, the system may work successfully. There is indeed a danger at that stage that nations may come to rely on it too much, as many countries did in the case of the League of Nations. But, as the present generation passes away, as the memories of the war are forgotten, new leaders, new slogans and new ideologies arise, new instruments of war are invented—it is then that danger will occur : it is then that nations may again become liable to rash actions, for as Lord Morley once said " it seems as if nothing was so hard for a nation to sustain as a long course of mere prudence."

Let us by all means do all we can to build up a workable international organisation for the maintenance of peace. Let us make a full contribution thereto, and be willing, if need be, to make sacrifices, but we must never entrust the safety of our country and Empire exclusively to anything except our own adequately organised strength.

CHAPTER VII  
THE DOMINIONS AND THE WAR

RE-ARMAMENT, 1938

I

IN 1934 I was given an unique opportunity to visit the four overseas Dominions. The occasion was an invitation to my wife and myself to attend the Melbourne Centenary as guests of the Commonwealth Government—among a host of distinguished people from all over the Empire. We visited South Africa on the outward journey, and New Zealand and Canada on return.

At that time I was Secretary to the Cabinet and Committee of Imperial Defence, and Chairman of a Standing Sub-Committee which had considered many defence questions referred for advice by the Governments of the Dominions ; I had been Secretary of the Imperial War Cabinet of 1917-18 and of the British Empire Delegation at the Paris and Washington Conferences ; and I had been associated with the programme for the first stages in re-armament, which was approved on the eve of our departure. I expected therefore everywhere to be consulted by the defence authorities, and by the Prime Ministers of the Dominions, who would wish to learn the latest news from London. I obtained official permission if the occasion arose, to give full information on the international portents which had led our Government to take up re-armament in earnest, and to discuss their effect on Imperial defence. These anticipations proved correct, and in every Dominion most of my time was taken up in discussing these matters with Prime Ministers and other Ministers, staff officers, Government officials, and sometimes by request with Opposition leaders—and in visiting defence establishments.

Public opinion in the Dominions proved similar to that at home. The first White Paper on Defence had not yet been issued and, although students of international affairs were becoming anxious, and the Press was beginning to reflect that feeling, the wider public did not yet realise the gravity of the outlook.

Some well-informed people in each Dominion took a grave view of the probable attitude in the event of the United Kingdom becoming involved in war—especially in South Africa and Canada. A few went so far as to suggest that the internal conflict of opinion might be so great as to involve civil war. In spite of these warnings, I obtained the impression that if we should be drawn into war, the distant Dominions would probably take the same view as we did. As a matter of historical truth, every Dominion from the time of my visit expedited its re-armament. The facts as to what had been done, so far as they had been made public, as well as my own impressions, were summarised in a broadcast on 19th December 1938 after my retirement from the public service.

## 2

In considering the attitude of the Dominions to re-armament, I pointed out, we must remember that each Member State of the Commonwealth is the sole judge of the action it will take to meet the needs of the situation.

That essential fact was recognised long before the term “Dominion” was applied to these great self-governing communities. As early as the year 1904 Mr Balfour, speaking in Parliament on the newly-established Committee of Imperial Defence, referred to them as “those self-governing Colonies of the Empire over which no office in this country has any control at all.” After expressing a hope that in days to come we might “have the advantage of their assistance in our councils,” he continued :

But I am certain that the self-governing Colonies will never allow any representative of theirs to come to the Defence Committee, if the Defence

Committee, with that addition had the smallest authority to impose obligations, financial, political, military, or naval, on the Colonies which they represent.

Incidentally, that was one of the reasons which led him to establish the Committee of Imperial Defence as an advisory and consultative, rather than as an executive body.

Within a few years Mr Balfour's hopes were realised. The Dominions, as they were now termed, had taken counsel with us on many matters, including defence. When war came in 1914, the Dominions, still as free as Mr Balfour had described them, as uncommitted then as they are to-day, spontaneously threw their weight into the struggle with tremendous material and moral effect. In the last two years of the war their statesmen sat with ours in an Imperial War Cabinet to concert the war effort of the Empire.

In 1926 it was thought advisable to define inter-Imperial relations more clearly, and, in the course of long and intricate discussions, a historic formula, with which the name of Lord Balfour will ever be associated, was evolved.

"They," namely, Great Britain and the Dominions, "are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."

If, at the Imperial Conference of 1926, emphasis was laid on the fact that "every self-governing member of the Empire is now the master of its destiny," it was also pointed out that "the British Empire is not founded upon negations."

"It depends essentially, if not formally," the Report declares, "on positive ideals. Free institutions are its life-blood. Free co-operation is its instrument. Peace, security, and progress are among its objects. . . . And, though every Dominion is now, and must always remain, the sole judge of the nature and extent of its co-operation, no common cause will, in our opinion, be thereby imperilled.

"Equality of status, so far as Britain and the Dominions are concerned, is thus the root principle governing our Inter-Imperial Relations."

After pointing out that "the principle of equality and similarity, appropriate to status, do not universally extend to function," the Report goes on to say that—

"to deal with questions of diplomacy and questions of defence, we require also flexible machinery—machinery which can, from time to time, be adapted to the changing circumstances of the world. . . ."

A flexible and efficient machinery has been gradually evolved. At Imperial Conferences and at such gatherings as the Silver Jubilee of King George V of beloved memory, foreign policy and defence are discussed in the light of the fullest available information. In the intervals the High Commissioners of the Dominions in London keep close contact with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. A stream of information, which in times of crisis becomes a flood, passes continuously between Downing Street and the Governments of the Dominions.

In defence matters the system of inter-communication and consultation dates back to pre-war days and has been steadily developed over a wide field. We have similar systems of organisation and training; uniform manuals, patterns of arms, equipment and stores for the sea, land and air forces of the Member States of the Commonwealth. Each of them, as the Imperial Conference of 1937 observed, "would thus be enabled to ensure more effectively its own security and, if it so desired, to co-operate with other countries of the Commonwealth with the least possible delay." Temporary exchanges of individual officers are arranged between the naval, military and air forces of the countries concerned. The Dominions take considerable advantage of the facilities of the Imperial Defence College in London for educating officers in the broader aspects of strategy, as well as of the Staff Colleges and various service establishments, maintained in this country, for more technical training and education. There is a free interchange of information between the nations of the Commonwealth, not only concerning the state of their respective forces, but also on all technical matters. Questions of policy

arising from such exchange and discussion between technical experts are submitted to the Governments concerned, which reserve complete freedom of decision and action. Arrangements have been made between some members of the Commonwealth forconcerting the scale of the defences of ports, and measures for co-operation in the defence of communications and other common interests. The Imperial Conference of 1937 commended the various activities I have described. The Conference also gave careful attention to the question of munitions and supplies required for defence both by the United Kingdom and other parts of the Commonwealth, as well as to the supply of food and feeding stuffs in time of emergency. The report adds this :

At the same time the Conference recognised that it is the sole responsibility of the several Parliaments of the British Commonwealth to decide the nature and scope of their own defence policy.

It will thus be seen that, in deciding its policy in connection with the rearmament problem, the Government of each Dominion had at its disposal the fullest available information on the international situation, on the intentions of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, on the state of the forces of the United Kingdom and other parts of the Empire, and on the latest technical developments in the Services. In addition, there was available to them a series of guiding principles on methods of co-operation evolved at various meetings of the Imperial Conference.

Let us now examine how each of the Dominions reacted to the situation that followed the Munich crisis of 1938. We could not expect to have found an identical attitude in all parts of the Commonwealth. The four distant Member States had this much in common : they were all relatively remote from the main centres of disturbance, and they all received a good deal of protection from

the British Navy. Some, however, from geographical or other circumstances were less threatened than others. Some were more concerned than others in particular regions; in the Pacific, for example, Australia, New Zealand and, though to a less extent, Canada; and South Africa in African problems. Nevertheless, no Dominion was able to ignore the troubles that beset the world, and all made considerable increases in their armaments. Further, their armament programmes were considerably influenced by the principles agreed to at meetings of the Imperial Conference.

### *Canada*

In Canada the Hon. Ian Mackenzie, Minister for National Defence, introducing the estimates of the Defence Department on 24th March 1938, deduced the following principles from previous Imperial Conferences :

First, that each self-governing portion of the Empire is primarily responsible for its own local defence. Second, that the security of the Empire is a matter of concern to all its Governments. Third, that military action taken at any time, in peace or war, is a matter of individual decision on the part of each Empire Government.

He made an interesting analysis of Canadian public opinion, which he divided into five groups; and by far the largest of them, he said, was a moderate and middle group that believed in no automatic commitments either for military action or neutrality.

“These,” he said, “would join with Great Britain or with the League in war for a principle or for the safety of the liberty of the world if convinced that liberty was seriously threatened. But they refuse to imperil Canadian unity by accepting in advance either one of the two following propositions: first, that when Great Britain is at war Canada must automatically go to her support with all her resources; or secondly, that when the League orders sanctions, Canada is bound to take action.”

Mr Mackenzie defined the purpose of the estimates as—

in the first place, for the preservation of Canadian neutrality; in the second place for the defence of our Canadian coast line, the defence of our ports

and terminals, and the defence of the focal areas of our trade routes in case of necessity.

Later on he added, in defining the exact position of Canada

it is only fair to say that to-day the main deterrent against a major attack upon this country by a European power is the existence of the British fleet in north Atlantic waters.

The Canadian defence programme included five new squadrons for the air force ; an addition of two destroyers to the four already in service ; the continuation of fortification works on the Pacific coast ; and equipment for the militia. Canada, like every part of the Empire, had found difficulty in obtaining delivery of all the armaments she required and she took steps to increase productive capacity. That was made considerably easier by orders placed by the United Kingdom in Canada for Bren guns and shells, and by the arrangement for the production of aircraft in Canada.

### *South Africa*

The Union's defence problem, as Mr Pirow showed when introducing the Defence Estimates early in September 1938 involved factors which were not found in any other part of the Commonwealth, or which, if found, were of minor importance. For example, he stated that with 60 per cent of the European population Afrikaans-speaking, no defence policy would command the support of the bulk of the people of the Union unless its scope were explicitly confined to the protection of South Africa and its vital interests. He reaffirmed an earlier Government statement that—

“ We are not bound, directly or indirectly, to take part in any war, in Africa, or elsewhere. We shall not take part in a war except when the true interests of South Africa make such participation inevitable. . . . We, as a Government,” Mr Pirow went on, “ will not even take part in an apparently inevitable war except after the people of this country, through their representatives in Parliament, have, with the greatest possible measure of unanimity, given us an unambiguous mandate to that effect.”

After rejecting the two extreme views that South Africa could never fight side by side with Great Britain and that when Britain was at war the Union was bound to participate, Mr Pirow continued :

It is not difficult to conceive of circumstances where it would be suicidal not to side with Great Britain. It is equally easy to imagine Great Britain in a quarrel in which nine-tenths of our people will refuse to participate.

Among several other factors applying especially to South Africa he spoke of her geographical position, on which he mentioned that :

after weighing all the possibilities, the General Staff has come to the conclusion that South Africa's maximum effort will not have to be made until six months after the outbreak of hostilities. This allows us a period for intensive preparation, the value of which can hardly be over-estimated.

As regards the Royal Navy, Mr Pirow said that the Government was not called upon to identify itself with either of the two following views : first, that the protection it afforded to South Africa justified a percentage contribution on export and import trade, or, second, with the opposite contention that their obligation was no greater than that of one of the South American Republics to the United States of America. Their relationship to the Navy, Mr Pirow explained, was governed by the Smuts-Churchill agreement of 1921. Under that agreement, when the defences of the Cape Peninsula were transferred by the War Office to the Union Government, the Union gave an assurance that the defences of the naval base at Simonstown would be kept up to the requisite standard.

The defence programme of 1938 provided for an expenditure of £6,000,000 spread over three years. £1,000,000 of it was to be spent on coast defences. An interesting point mentioned by Mr Pirow was that the main defences of Capetown would include 15-inch guns. These provided a higher degree of insurance than was recommended by the United Kingdom authorities when consulted in 1928—before the large extensions of the dock and harbour

facilities. The programme envisaged, among other things, land forces totalling 137,000 men, and an air force which Mr Pirow claimed "within the limits of its equipment, will bear comparison with any force inside or outside the Commonwealth." In addition a considerable development in the production of war material in South Africa was provided.

In the two great Dominions of the South Pacific, far removed from the main centre of British power and with populations of British descent, we meet, naturally, with a rather different emphasis on Imperial defence.

### *Australia*

Australian public opinion was deeply interested in defence. It was the predominant issue at the last general election before the war. For five years the Commonwealth had been progressively improving its defences, but after 1934 the *tempo* in Australia, as in Great Britain, greatly increased. In a statement to Parliament on the 27th April 1938, Mr Lyons, the Prime Minister, summarised the policy of the Commonwealth Government as follows :

"The scheme of Australian defence is related to a wider pattern of Empire defence, and its fundamental basis is Empire sea-power, and the Singapore naval base. Nevertheless, it is complementary to this conception of Empire collective security that we should do all we can to defend ourselves, and the new programme is claimed to be a substantial step towards this end. It will provide," the Australian Prime Minister said, "for the cruisers necessary for trade defence in our local waters. It will greatly strengthen the land, sea and air defences of the main ports and centres of population. It will strengthen the equipment and munitions reserves of the field army and increase the permanent personnel and the general standard of efficiency. Finally, it will provide greater resources for the local production of munitions, and complete the national planning of all phases of activity associated with the defence forces.

"The basis of the Government's policy," Mr Lyons went on, "has been endorsed by the best advice obtainable at home and abroad, but the deterioration of the world situation which occurred subsequent to the Imperial Conference of last year has resulted in a programme much greater than the one contemplated at that time. . . ."

The programme announced on that occasion by Mr Lyons for implementing the Government's policy was afterwards further increased. For example, the additional expenditure on defence in the three years after 1938 was from £24,000,000 to about £43,000,000, and the total expenditure in that period was to be £63,000,000, instead of the £43,000,000 announced in April. By 1940-41 the Royal Australian Navy was to include five modern cruisers as well as the older cruiser *Adelaide*, four escort vessels, two new and four older destroyers, twelve motor torpedo-boats and a surveying ship. The strength of the militia was to be increased from 35,000 to 70,000 men, and that of the air force from nine to eighteen squadrons. The programme contemplated a naval dock for capital ships at Sydney and included also modernisation of coast defences, provision of anti-aircraft defences, much new equipment of all kinds and other measures for increasing the efficiency of the Commonwealth defence forces.

Australia showed great foresight in laying the foundations of a sound system of munitions production. I was privileged to visit the principal establishments maintained for this purpose and I was struck by their efficiency and the keenness of the highly expert personnel. As part of the defence programme of 1938 the existing facilities were extended, and, in addition, Australia, like ourselves, supplemented the normal sources of supply in time of war by organising the co-operation and assistance of industry.

#### *New Zealand*

New Zealand, like Australia, attached the greatest importance to Empire co-operation in defence. In 1937 the Imperial Conference was informed that :

The New Zealand Government were anxious to make sure that expenditure on the three Services was properly balanced and laid out so as best to enable the New Zealand forces to act in the most efficient way possible, not only in the local defence of their country but also in Commonwealth defence

in co-operation with the forces of other countries of the Commonwealth. In this connection great importance was attached to the Singapore base—

to which New Zealand had contributed no less than £1,000,000.

The estimated expenditure on defence for the year 1938-39 was £2,000,000, which showed an increase of nearly £400,000 over the previous year and of over £800,000 over the year 1936-37. The programme included the maintenance of a naval unit consisting of two modern cruisers and ancillary services, strengthening of coast defence services and considerable air force developments.

### *Eire*

The position in Eire before the war was peculiar, and notwithstanding the settlement of long-standing differences between the United Kingdom and Eire Governments achieved in the year 1938 it was not easy to see questions of defence as affecting Eire in their proper perspective. The United Kingdom Government, however, had recently transferred to the Government of Eire the properties at the three defended ports, which under the Treaty of 1921 were occupied by United Kingdom care and maintenance parties. Mr de Valera pronounced that the Government of Eire would not allow their territory to be used as a base for attack on Great Britain by any foreign country, but it was uncertain whether, in the event of war, Britain would be allowed to use either the ports or aerodromes in Eire for trade protection.

From this bird's-eye review it will be seen that the four distant Dominions had all reacted to the situation which had brought about rearmament in much the same way as the United Kingdom and other countries. In other words, they felt obliged to rearm.

In the *form* of their respective rearmament the principles hammered out jointly in quieter times at Imperial Conferences proved a valuable guide to them as to us. They all began by carrying out

their primary responsibility for their own local defence as suggested at various Imperial Conferences. This does not mean that mutual defence was ignored. The distant Dominions all recognised the importance of the protection they receive as "autonomous communities within the Empire" from the Royal Navy. They all assisted the Navy in its task of protecting territory and communications by defending the naval bases within their territory and the mercantile ports where shipping collects. Several maintained in addition naval forces to protect the focal points and trade routes near their own coasts. By increasing their resources for manufacture of munitions they relieved the strain on the main sources of supply for the Empire in the United Kingdom and created a nucleus for expansion in war, the value of which became inestimable.

Standardisation of armaments and equipment, uniform systems of training, exchanges of officers and so forth greatly facilitated co-operation if and when any of the Member States of the Commonwealth should so decide. This applied to all arms, but the increase of air forces, the training of large numbers of pilots, and the enlistment of considerable numbers of splendid young men from the Dominions in our Air Force were particularly interesting developments.

Some people, in all parts of the Empire, whose opinions were entitled to respect, were dissatisfied at the absence of military commitments. In theory, it is true that a definite obligation with a military treaty appears more satisfactory than the system I have described. In practice this is more doubtful. The waging of war under modern conditions involves a national effort on a scale that can only be made with the support of an overwhelming popular opinion on the particular issue. On a doubtful issue that might not be forthcoming in any event.

In summing up my views in the broadcast to which I referred earlier in this chapter, I said :

"For my part I am an optimist, due partly perhaps to extensive

personal ties of relationship and friendship with the Dominions. But my optimism is due even more to the fact that for thirty years I have been privileged to witness from inside the working of the machinery of consultation at many inspiring gatherings of Empire statesmen. I have visited all the four overseas Dominions, and know something of their problems and difficulties. I also know something of British Governments, and as the result of all this I find it difficult to conceive circumstances in which this country is likely to become involved in a major war on an issue in which popular sentiment in the Dominions is not overwhelmingly sympathetic to our cause. I will not be so foolish as to prophesy at what point any particular nation of the Commonwealth would decide that its vital interests were engaged ; in what circumstances it would intervene actively or at what moment ; in what theatre of war, or by what methods, but this much, speaking of course entirely on my own responsibility, I will say : If I were the Chief of the General Staff of a country likely to become involved in war with the United Kingdom, I would warn my Government—‘ Beware of underrating the Dominions.’ ”

#### THE DOMINIONS AT WAR, 1939-45

##### 5

We have already seen that the Dominions were just as free as we were to decide whether they would take part in the war or not, and, if they did elect to do so, in what theatres of war and in what form. That is proved, if proof were needed, by the decision of Eire to maintain neutrality, and of South Africa to exert her strength on the African continent. The latter decision, which underwent some modifications, did not detract from the value of the Union’s war effort.

Between the two world wars there were two movements in the Empire which, on a superficial view, appeared mutually

destructive: namely, the growth of conscious nationalism, which varied in degree in each Dominion; and the evolution of a system of contact and co-operation between the self-governing units of the Commonwealth.

The first movement encouraged a widespread feeling, shared by many distinguished people not only in the Empire, but still more in foreign countries, that we should never again witness that spontaneous spirit of co-operation that proved so important in the war of 1914-18.

The evidence on which they relied can be summarised as follows: the insistence of the Dominions on separate representation at the Peace Conference, at the League of Nations, and at International Conferences; the establishment by Canada, Australia, South Africa and Eire of separate diplomatic representation in many capitals; the growth of separate naval, land and air forces; and until the Ottawa Conference of 1932 at any rate, a tendency towards economic separatism.

Even the glowing words of the Balfour Declaration of 1926 (pp. 133-134) did not wholly remove these gloomy doubts.

The reasons for disappointment were the stress laid on autonomy, equality, lack of mutual responsibility, freedom in association, and the absence of any binding condition, other than common allegiance to the Crown. As Principal Secretary of the memorable Imperial Conference of 1926, present not only at these meetings but alone with Lord Balfour at 4 Carlton Gardens when, after, consultation with some of the wisest Empire statesmen, he prepared the draft, I felt no misgivings. I remembered that the Balfour formula represented a state of affairs that had existed for more than twenty years, as proved by the extract from Mr Balfour's speech in the House of Commons in 1904, quoted in Chapter IV.

Confidence in the future was further strengthened by viewing in retrospect developments after 1904: in 1907 and 1909 the building up of co-operation between the fighting Services, in armaments,

strategical and tactical doctrine, manuals of instruction and exchanges of staff officers; in 1911 Sir Edward Grey's revealing statement on the international outlook; in 1912 Sir Robert Borden's visit, and in 1914 his appointment of Sir George Perley to represent Canada at the Committee of Imperial Defence; on the outbreak of war in 1914 the inspiring common front; in 1917-18 the meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet; after the war the great work of the British Empire delegations at Paris and later at the Washington Naval Conference; and the similarity of outlook between us all on world affairs.

All these considerations, and above all the character of the leading figures of the distant Dominions, gave confidence that the formula of 1926 would not put back the hands of the clock. This view was strengthened by the conferences of 1929 and 1930, which hammered out the Statute of Westminster, by the Ottawa Conference of 1932 and even more by the growing interest of the Dominions in Imperial defence.

## 6

When the day came to declare war in 1939 all four of the great overseas Dominions took exactly the same decision on merits as we did. That was an overwhelming source of moral strength and confidence in the justice of our cause. The value of their material co-operation is shown by the following brief summary:

*At sea*, Canadian destroyers were in action off the French coast in 1940. Later the Canadian Navy, greatly expanded, played a conspicuous part, in co-operation with the allied Navies and Air Forces (including Canadian air forces) in anti-U-boat warfare and other naval and amphibious operations. The Royal Australian Navy, with its fine modern cruisers and destroyers, co-operated splendidly with the United States and British Pacific fleets in the prolonged naval operations and amphibious campaigns against Japan, but the early exploits of H.M.A.S. Sydney in the Mediter-

ranean must not be forgotten. The small Royal New Zealand Navy also made a worthy contribution to allied sea power, and the part played by H.M.S. Achilles, manned by New Zealand seamen at the Battle of the River Plate, will live in history. South Africa also—and this is not widely known—besides looking after its own coastline, maintained a flotilla of small ships in the Mediterranean throughout the North African campaigns, and acquired a considerable reputation in the Royal Navy.

*On land* the early arrival of a Canadian division in this country was followed soon by others; their employment included active service in France in June 1940, the Spitzbergen expedition, the great amphibious test at Dieppe in August, 1942; and their famous exploits in the long Italian campaign and in the final drive into Germany. The Empire will never forget the contribution of Australian military forces to the common cause in Egypt, Libya, Greece and Crete prior to their withdrawal for the defence of their own homelands; nor their stubborn resistance to Japanese aggression in New Guinea and elsewhere; nor the part they played in the dour amphibious campaigns in the islands of the South Pacific. New Zealand's military contribution is memorable for the conspicuous services of General Freyberg's division in North Africa and Italy, and for the fact that, notwithstanding the Japanese threat and New Zealand's responsibilities in the Pacific islands, no section of her forces was withdrawn from the Middle East area. Mention of the Middle East recalls also the doughty deeds of the South Africans in Abyssinia, Egypt, Libya and Italy, where they shared our victories, and to the regret of the whole Empire, our losses. South African participation in the occupation of Madagascar in the autumn of 1942 must also be remembered.

And what of that famous veteran soldier, statesman and philosopher, who carried so blithely as heavy a load as any one in the war, Field-Marshal Smuts? Great as was his contribution in the 1914-18 war, it was even greater from 1939-45. His many visits to London cheered us and raised our spirits.

And what of the air forces of the Dominions? There again, over sea and land in every theatre of war their prowess will take an outstanding place in the history of the war. The Empire Air Training Scheme in Canada also made an outstanding contribution to our joint efforts in the air.

The contribution of war material also must not be overlooked, especially in Canada and Australia (where Mr. Bruce laid the foundations with great foresight more than twenty years ago); the development of coast defences; and the building of merchant ships. The supply of food and raw materials, including the essential uranium from Canada for the atomic bomb, were especially important. In scientific research, also, Canada and other Dominions made a big contribution and liaison was very close. The collective value of their efforts cannot be exaggerated.

Unfortunately circumstances prevented the establishment of an Imperial War Cabinet, as in the 1914-18 war, to control our joint war effort. The heavy responsibilities of the Prime Ministers in their respective Dominions prevented them from timing their visits so as to coincide. Nevertheless close co-operation was achieved. The system of inter-communication developed at Imperial Conferences, especially after the Balfour Declaration of 1926, proved invaluable at all levels—that is to say between Prime Ministers, general staffs and Government departments—and the mutual confidence and understanding established thereby overcame time and space. This system was supplemented by a stream of visits to London by Prime Ministers (Mr Mackenzie King, Mr Menzies, Field-Marshal Smuts and Mr Fraser) and Cabinet Ministers, eminent scientists and other distinguished men. As a result of all this, no hitch occurred in the sphere of control.

After the intervention in the struggle of Japan and the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Australia made special arrangements to ensure closer co-operation.

Mr Bruce attended meetings of the United Kingdom War Cabinet, as special representative of the Commonwealth of

Australia. No more appropriate representative could be imagined. As Prime Minister of the Commonwealth from 1923 to 1929 he took a prominent part in the important Empire developments of those years, including the Balfour Declaration, and laid the foundations of the Commonwealth forces. As High Commissioner and Australian representative on the Committee of Imperial Defence since 1933 he took a stimulating part in the work of that body during the years of rearmament. No other Australian statesman knew so well the inner workings of both Governments, and his appointment proved a tower of strength to the War Cabinet.

Only second to Mr Bruce in this kind of experience was Mr Casey, who was a member of the War Cabinet *in partibus*—to pirate Lord Hailey's expression—not as a representative of Australia, but as Minister of State in the Middle East.

There may have been mistakes in the direction of the 1939–45 war, as must be expected in a struggle of such magnitude, but so far as the co-operation of the four great overseas Dominions is concerned there is little, if anything, to criticise and much to admire. It is of good augury for the future.

We must never forget, however, that the primary need of our sea-borne Empire is safe sea communications and shipping, for, as Mr Churchill has said—"Without ships we cannot live, and without them we cannot conquer." It is the duty of all citizens of the Empire, including, of course, ourselves, to keep their respective Governments up to the mark in that respect.

The success of our system of Empire co-operation in a time of unexampled danger results from the wisdom and foresight of the British and Dominion statesmen, who gathered together at intervals of three or four years and patiently built even better than they knew. The system of co-operation without the slightest infringe-

ment of autonomy that they evolved is essential to the life of our own Empire and of the communities that compose it. This principle, which has proved itself so well in the nations of the British Commonwealth, should provide a safer guide than "self-determination" pure and simple in settling the future of the European countries. As Mr E. H. Carr puts it in his *Conditions of Peace*:

The extension of this system of divided, but not incompatible, loyalties is the only tolerable solution of the problem of self-determination, for it is the only one which will satisfy at one and the same time the needs of modern military and economic organisation, and the urge of human groups based on common tradition. . . . It is in this interplay between centralisation and devolution, in this recognition that some human forces require to be handled by larger, and others by smaller, groups than at present, that we must seek a solution to the baffling problem of self-determination.

The British Empire is itself by far the most hopeful contribution that has been made towards the solution of problems of international order. It is essential that it should survive, and wholehearted co-operation between the Governments of the Empire and the United States, for which we cannot be too thankful, is the strongest assurance of this.

The strongest links of Empire are not those of the constitution, but of the people. Just think how numerous those links are, and how closely they are connected: the Churches, missionary societies, parliamentary associations, the various professions—law, medicine, the fighting Services—shipping and trade, labour and trade unions, communications by air mail, telegraph and radio, the Press and broadcasting, the universities and schools with interchanges of professors, lecturers and masters, science and research knit up in many fields, philanthropic and learned societies working in joint endeavour, literature, art, music, the theatre, and sport—the list is endless. In normal times there is a continuous exchange of visits, letters and proceedings between them. And, most important of all, there are innumerable family ties, renewed by correspondence and personal visits.

When Gulliver on his travels awoke from his long sleep after shipwreck in the land of the Lilliputians he found himself bound by threads so fine as to be barely perceptible, but so numerous as to hold him fast. That is the measure of the real bonds that bind us together.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EMPIRE AND THE FUTURE

#### I

IN the Levant there used to be a proverb : " With your relations eat and drink, but do no business."

Behind its cynicism there is a grain of truth. Family quarrels are proverbial. The parent may forget that the son has grown up ; he will not devolve responsibility or take him fully into confidence. The son may have his own grievances too. He may think his father fossilised, out of date ; too much wedded to the methods of the past. That instinct may decide him to start on his own ; to enter some totally different calling from his father's, or, maybe, to emigrate and carve out a career for himself in the Empire or elsewhere abroad. Then matters go better. They exchange their ideas on a basis of mutual sympathy, affection, pride and sense of responsibility, taking counsel with one another on a basis of equality so that the spirit of the family as well as the individuality of its members is preserved.

In the family business of the British Empire we have passed through some of these phases, but we have learned not only to eat and drink together, but also to transact the most serious business, even the business of war.

First came the early colonial phases ; then the growth of each colony to complete self-government ; later their consolidation, the grouping of separate Colonies into Dominions ; and since the 1914-18 war the stage of getting more closely together in a Commonwealth on a basis of complete autonomy and responsibility, equality of status, " united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations " —to quote again the famous Balfour formula.

In the process of those gradual developments there have at times arisen, as had to be expected, some of the troubles which arise in the family: in early days impatience at Downing Street control; difficulties—especially at the beginning of the present century—about defence matters; doubts as to whether if the mother country went to war the Dominions were *ipso facto* committed to war—could the King beat war in one part of his Dominions and not in another, and so forth? And that, of course, inevitably raised the question of the control of foreign policy, separate diplomatic representation in foreign countries, separate representation at the Paris Peace Conference and at the League of Nations, when it came into existence.

These controversies, however, were never allowed to get out of control. They were handled by a succession of statesmen of great wisdom and experience, Lord Bennett, and Mr Bruce, the founder of the modern system of defence organisation in Australia. Since the Colonial Conference of 1887 (the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee) discussion has become franker and more intimate at each succeeding conference.

Let us glance at some of the landmarks in our progress.

The conference of 1907 (the first to be styled an Imperial Conference) and its sequel the Imperial Conference on Defence of 1909—the first of the long series that I attended—laid the foundations of Empire co-operation in defence. The principle was established that the defence forces of the Dominions were to be of a national character and under control of their respective Governments. But arrangements were made at the same time for naval co-operation in peace and war, and in all Services throughout the Empire for similarity in armaments, manuals, text-books, drill books, exchange of staff officers, and the opening to the Dominions forces of Staff Colleges and other technical educational establishments. We are reaping the value of that to-day, thirty-nine years later.

During the Imperial Conference of 1911 Sir Edward Grey made his famous statement at a meeting of the Committee of Imperial

Defence, attended by Empire representatives, on the international situation, and the defence aspects of the question were also set forth in detail. In the following year this was repeated for the benefit of Sir Robert Borden and a number of his colleagues who had just come into office, and in 1914 Sir Robert Borden appointed Sir George Perley, still a member of his Government, as Canadian High Commissioner, with authority to attend meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

All this helped to prepare the way for the marvellous solidarity of the Empire on the outbreak of war in 1914 and 1939, which staggered the world, and for the effective co-operation of the various forces throughout both wars.

In 1917 and 1918 came the meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet, once described by Sir Robert Borden as a cabinet of nations, and the Imperial War Conference; and in 1919 the Peace Conference, with representation of the Dominions and the establishment of the British Empire delegation and of the joint secretariat.

After the war, though the tremendous growth of Dominions' status had increased the difficulties, progress was even more notable. At the Imperial Conference of 1923 principles were established for co-operation in Imperial defence, which were extended and consolidated in 1926. This Imperial Conference of 1926 was indeed one of the most notable of the whole series, for the Report of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee established the principles of our mutual relations on the basis of the Balfour formula, the arrangements for implementing which were concerted at a technical Conference on the Operation of Dominion Legislation in 1929 and completed by the Imperial Conference in 1930. The system of relations with foreign countries was also established and a number of most important details were settled.

Another notable landmark was the Imperial Economic Conference at Ottawa in 1932, presided over by Lord Bennett, the first important conference to be held out of London. The seal was

appropriately set on the whole series by the Imperial Conference of 1937 held at the time of the Coronation, and accompanied by an outburst of loyalty throughout the Empire.

That is a pretty good record of progress, but it is not all. Between the conferences there has grown up a comprehensive and continuous system for the exchange by cable of information and opinion at all levels, from that of the Prime Ministers downwards throughout the whole range of official matters of mutual concern and interest. This has been supplemented for many years by frequent meetings—daily during the war—of the Dominions' High Commissioners with the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. Having deputised occasionally earlier in the war for the Dominions Secretary in his absence, I can vouch for their practical character.

In the sphere of defence the Committee of Imperial Defence, with its network of sub-committees, has been used more and more to supplement and prepare for the discussions on defence at Imperial Conferences, and to co-ordinate the work of preparation throughout the Empire. As long ago as 1911 it had been arranged that representatives appointed by the Governments of the Dominions should be invited to the Committee when matters concerning their defence were under consideration. During the fifteen years before the war of 1939–45 the Dominions in differing degree and method made increasing use of the Committee, some by nominating representatives to attend its meetings regularly, others in different ways—for example, by referring questions for advice. Whether they were represented or not, however, full information was sent as to the conclusions of this advisory Committee on all matters in which they might be interested.

Representatives of the Dominions forces were also welcomed in considerable numbers at such institutions as the Staff Colleges of the Navy, Army and Air Force and the Imperial Defence College—a post-graduate course for comparatively senior officers of the three defence Services and civil servants for the study of war on

the highest level and especially of conjoint operations. Among many Dominions representatives who attended the course and have earned distinction in the war of 1939-45 were Generals McNaughton and Crerar and Sir Frederick Sheden, the distinguished Secretary of the Australian Defence Department.

In the result, a common doctrine was built up on strategy, tactics of all three Services, whether operating separately or in combination ; and all the Dominions, according to their circumstances, had at the outbreak of war War Books similar to our own setting forth all the precautionary measures that their respective Governments had approved to safeguard their interests against the first impact of war.

Stress has been laid on Imperial defence, because, between Imperial Conferences, consultation on this subject has been one of the most important permanent and continuous links of Empire. But owing to the need for secrecy in the details of this work the public has no conception of the contribution which was made by this system of consultation towards co-operation in the two great wars—a co-operation which will live in history as one of the closest that has ever been known, and which will become in course of time a legend and a faith.

During the war of 1939-45 the most interesting development was the frequent visits of Prime Ministers of all the Dominions, and sometimes of other Ministers especially nominated by them, to London, where they regularly attended meetings of the War Cabinet. Field-Marshal Smuts's frequent and fruitful visits will long be remembered. The Prime Minister of Australia, in addition, accredited Sir Earle Page to the War Cabinet as permanent Australian representative in 1941, and he was succeeded in 1942 by Mr Bruce. There was also a continuous interchange of visits by experts, and all the Dominions have scientific missions in London to keep touch with the extraordinary developments in research and invention over the whole range of scientific endeavour, which have by no means reached finality.

What is the object of this long résumé of the past when we are considering the Empire and the future? The explanation is that, in the forty years or more during which I have been associated with Empire business, I have seen order evolved out of chaos; harmony out of threatened discord; apparently insoluble problems resolved one after the other; and complete co-operation achieved without friction and without the smallest sacrifice of autonomy—as Lord Bennett has described it, the greatest political experiment on record.

Looking to the future I believe that any advance must start from the present position, which has stood the supreme test of two of the greatest wars in history, and future developments must be hammered out by the same methods.

At the moment the ties which unite the Empire are the following:

1. Common allegiance to the Crown.
2. Our free association as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.
3. Defence.
4. The intangibles, that is to say, tradition, and the ties and contacts of kinship and long association.

Let us now examine each of these ties to ascertain the directions in which advance can be considered.

Common allegiance to the Crown has to be seen to be believed. The latest example was the extraordinary outburst of loyalty and enthusiasm evoked by the Royal visit to Canada shortly before the war. Another conspicuous instance, which I witnessed myself, was the visit of H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester to Australia in 1934, which was accompanied by astonishing scenes of loyalty to and affection for the Royal Family. In New Zealand it was just the same. The holding by His Royal Highness of the office of Governor-General of the Commonwealth is an event of good augury for the future of the Empire.

The further development of our free association as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations is essentially a matter for Governments, and especially for the Prime Ministers—a point which Mr Bruce has always pressed, and which cannot be emphasised too strongly. In this field we must be content with gradual progress as in the past. We must remember that every Member State of the Commonwealth has its own internal political problems, sometimes very difficult problems, which govern the extent and form of its co-operation.

Subject to this, a number of suggestions which were propounded by Mr Curtin, in his speech on British and World Co-operation on 14th December 1943, deserve special attention.

1. Frequent meetings of the Imperial Conference and especially of the Prime Ministers, which will be greatly facilitated by the development of air transport.

2. These meetings to be held in other parts of the Empire as well as London in order to emphasise to the various parts of the Empire the reality of the inter-relations of its Governments and peoples.

3. The High Commissioners in London and the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs should normally be a Standing Committee of the Imperial Conference to handle matters in the intervals when they cannot be dealt with by Prime Ministers or Ministers.

4. Periodical meetings (again not necessarily in London) of Ministers other than Prime Ministers, as occasion may require, to deal with important questions of mutual interest, such as trade and communications.

5. On a lower plane, the staffs of High Commissioners to be rotated with other members of the services of the part of the Empire to which they belong. Attachments and exchanges between the staffs of corresponding departments throughout the Empire. Their use as liaison officers, particularly in the formative stage of policy questions. Australia and New Zealand for many years before the war had, and still have, liaison officers with the British Government. Mr Casey, the late Governor of Bengal, was the first, and worked in the British Cabinet office for six years.

6. All Dominions to be represented on the Secretariat of the Imperial Conference, on which Mr Curtin made a number of detailed suggestions. Something of the kind has always been organised at Imperial Conferences since the 1914-18 war.

These practical proposals are all within the orbit of previous development and all much in my own line of thought. To this list might be added various suggestions for the establishment of regional standing conferences, in the Pacific and Africa for example, with which other parts of the Empire, such as India, the Colonies and Mandated Territories would be associated ; perhaps also the Colonies and Mandated Territories of other countries—but that brings us into the field of international organisation, which is beyond our subject. Australia and New Zealand have agreed principles for co-operation in the post-war period—the first step towards a regional agreement.

But it must be repeated that these are all matters for the Imperial Conference and especially for the Prime Ministers.

On defence we should proceed on present lines—but we cannot afford to proceed too slowly. No one can foretell what the post-war world will be like, but as yet it is not a bed of roses : a sullen resentful world, mistrustful of all ideologies, of all the “isms” from Fascism to Pacifism, which got us in this frightful mess. For some years we shall be poor and exhausted. All the old insoluble problems, which we tried and failed to settle at the Peace Conference in 1919 are being faced, and few solutions have been offered that inspire much confidence in the light of history. Already ugly portents have obtruded themselves.

The one certain thing is that we must hold together and remain strong. Let us stand by our friendships and alliances and develop them to the utmost, but the combined strength of the Empire must be sufficient to make us worth while as friends and allies and to keep our end up. That can only be provided we hold together. We should aim at greater self-sufficiency within the Empire ; less dependence on outside sources, bearing in mind that in two successive wars we had to bear a terrific burden for over two years. That means some co-ordinated development of our resources on the lines of an Empire Development Council as suggested by Lord Bennett. Again it is a matter for the Imperial Conference and Prime Ministers.

Up to now the suggestions have been confined to possible developments within the official circle. What can be done outside? That brings us to "intangibles." These are tremendously important, and are kept alive by all kinds of methods. Here is just one example. I shall never forget the astonishing scene I witnessed in an Australian capital when the band of a Guards regiment, just landed, came marching down the street playing "Land of Hope and Glory." Not an eye was dry. Common language, of course, is a tremendous asset, although in some Dominions a second language is spoken by large numbers of our fellow citizens. The similarity of our cabinet and parliamentary systems of government is another strong point. It would take too long to cite all the regular systems of contact and interchange in such matters as religion, universities, colleges and schools, law, the Empire Parliamentary Association, the Institutions of Foreign Affairs, the fighting Services, medicine, all branches of science (strengthened during the war), music, literature, poetry, the Press, the theatre, the arts, sport and so forth. It is all-important that all these contacts should be kept vital, progressive and expanding. That is the direction in which the unofficial or semi-official world can help most.

Yet the most important of all ties is the prodigious network of family and personal contacts, inter-marriage, much stimulated by the war, the vast interchange of visits, letters, cables, and so forth. We are sometimes told that these ties are a wasting asset owing to the lapse of years, the distance separating us, the existence in some Dominions of large populations of non-British origin, and so forth, but these handicaps can be overcome by continuous effort on the lines suggested above and by such modern developments as long-distance radio and especially the rapid advance of air communications. There can be no more important contribution than the swift development and cheapening of such facilities.

At the bottom, running through it all, is our common love of liberty. In the words of Burke :

We view the establishment of the English colonies on principles of liberty as that which is to render this kingdom venerable to future ages. . . . We entreat you, therefore, to cleave for ever to those principles, as being the true bond of union in this Empire.

Only the fringe of the subject has been touched. No mention has been made of Eire because the less said about that the better ; nor of India, because it is under consideration at the time of writing ; nor of the Colonial Empire, because the subject is too large for treatment here. But the British Commonwealth of Nations is the core of the problem and if we continue to develop as we have done we shall collectively remain a great force in the world, and an example to all the nations of how to conduct international business.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CONTROL OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

TO-DAY, as in 1920, in concert with the United States of America, the Dominions, Russia, and other Allies, we have conquered all our foes. Both wars were fought with rather a similar object. In moving the Vote of Credit on 6th August 1914, Mr Asquith said :

If I am asked what we are fighting for, I can reply in two sentences. In the first place to fulfil a solemn obligation [that was, of course, the Belgian guarantee] . . . I say, secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle, in these days when material force seems to be the dominant influence and factor in the development of mankind, that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering Power.

In 1939 Mr Neville Chamberlain said much the same thing in other words :

Our general purpose . . . is to redeem Europe from the perpetual and recurring fear of German aggression, and enable the peoples of Europe to preserve their liberties and their independence.

There is a marked resemblance between those two passages.

In 1920 the principle for which we had fought appeared to be completely established. That is again the case so far as Germany is concerned, but we cannot claim that the peoples of Eastern Europe have secured their liberty and independence, as we understand these words ; though we all hope that the peace negotiations are going to improve matters.

To-day, as twenty-eight years ago, we are on the eve of another effort to solve the problem that has baffled mankind down the ages—the preservation of peace.

Coming to the international situation, Germany is again down and out—another point of resemblance ; the United States has

again emerged from the war as the strongest Power. But beyond that, the changes are very considerable. Russia, who collapsed in the last war, has borne the brunt of the victory over the German Army and is now the dominant military power in Europe. In 1920 that position was held by France, who had borne the principal military burden of the war on land. To-day France is in difficulties. Italy, in 1920 one of the victorious Allies, is to-day in the same plight as Germany. Japan, another former ally, also lies prostrate.

As to Britain, I am going to quote Viscount Templewood's address at the Royal Empire Society on 29th May 1945:

On the one hand we have emerged from these years of trial with very great prestige. On the other hand, we have sacrificed in the struggle invaluable lives and great quantities of our accumulated wealth. Judged by material resources, our relative position in the world has been weakened. Judged by moral standards it has seldom, if ever, been higher.

From the purely realistic point of view, our position is not very good. Our island is peculiarly exposed to the future developments in armaments: rockets, flying bombs, atomic warfare and radar, all of which may eventually be combined. The only one of them in which we really excel is radar. The other three we lack.

Moreover, and still speaking realistically, the continental balance of power (unpopular phrase, I know, but after all it kept peace in Europe for the longest period since the age of the Antonines) has vanished with the annihilation of Germany and Italy and depends now on Russia and the two great sea Powers. We are now counting on those three Great Powers to preserve in peace the same unity as they did in war.

I do not want to throw cold water on those high hopes, which I share to the full, but it would be foolish to underrate the difficulties.

Firstly, in time of war, when liberty is at stake, differences are sunk and unity is not hard to secure. I have seen that for myself. But after past wars it has rarely survived for long. After 1815, and after 1918, it soon disappeared. The Potsdam Conference,

the situation in Eastern Europe, and the hold-up of the Conference of Foreign Ministers are not too encouraging. However, my own experience is that every conference has its crisis, and only after that is agreement ever reached. I have hardly ever known that principle fail. So I have been rather reassured by Mr Bevin's statements earlier in 1946 and I am not unduly depressed.

Secondly, the caption "Abolish war or perish" appeals much more to nations like ourselves with huge concentrations of population that are peculiarly exposed to the weapons of the future than it does to those who have vast territories in which to scatter their war industries.

Thirdly, the greatest enemies of unity are the racial, ideological, religious and economic movements that arise inside the nations, disintegrating them into factions, paralysing Governments, and causing civil wars. I can hardly think of a country in Europe that does not reveal these sorts of disintegrating internal difficulties. And public opinion sometimes compels Great Powers to take sides in such internal disputes, which then spread across the frontiers, dividing nation from nation, as in the Spanish affair which preceded the 1939-45 war. To those difficulties must be added the long-standing and intractable differences between particular nations that are not susceptible of settlement on any principle yet discovered. For example, most of the problems that baffled the well-intentioned and very able statesmen under whom I was working very closely in 1919 at Paris and Versailles are still unsolved. Most of them are almost insoluble, and new problems have been added.

Against all that there is some reassurance in the fact that no nations, or very few nations, are in a state to undertake a major war for some years, and in this respect the task of the World Organisation should not be too difficult at first, provided the three nations that won the war, and which alone have the power to preserve the peace, can hold together. But they must make a reasonable adjustment of their relations with the smaller nations. That is a particularly hard task. Maladjustment constantly hampers

international organisations and conferences and I have known it reduce them to impotence.

The real danger, however, does not arise immediately, but as the years pass and with them the people and the leaders who have experienced the recent world war. To quote Mr J. G. Lockhart, in *The Peacemakers, 1814-1815* :

This State grows. That State declines. There is a new creed or a new economy. And presently an age comes to birth that tears asunder the bonds, the pacts, the protocols, the treaties with which a paternal past has sought to bind it : and again there is war.

## 2

It is plain that Great Britain, with her great prestige, inextricably linked to Europe, yet also a World Power and an outpost in Europe of the great forces of the New World, which twice in the present century have redressed the balance of the Old, has a most responsible part to play in the World Organisation. But the "vurra respected man" is not always popular. He is often suspected of thinking that what suits him must suit others with different temperaments, living in totally different conditions. At the present moment, after a prolonged cessation of travelling facilities, years of censorship and more or less doped news, we are isolated from the currents of European opinion. In a glimpse I get, travelling twice a month to and from Paris, I am often astonished at the criticism I hear of ourselves by continental peoples ; though I must say it is usually accompanied by self-criticism.

Now, we shall have to be tolerant, sympathetic, understanding and restrained. All of us, the Government, Parliament, political parties, Press, broadcasting, and last but not least Chatham House itself, must check our exasperating tendency to lecture foreign nations, and, in concert with the other United Nations, we must for years and years keep a very close eye at home and abroad on what John Morley called "epidemics of unreason."

I have tried to bring out the magnitude and complexity of the

problems that students of international affairs must meet. You may agree or you may disagree with that appreciation, in whole or in part, but I believe everyone will agree in one thing ; that in existing circumstances we must work to ensure that the policy of the United Kingdom, and so far as we are able to secure it, the whole of the Commonwealth and Empire, is directed towards ensuring the success of the World Organisation ; for, whether that system is sound or not—and I confess I have always been a doubter—we are deeply committed to it as a nation and we must do our utmost to make it succeed.

It will probably be generally conceded also that in the difficult days to come it is of the first importance that the representatives of this country at the World Organisation and in all their dealings with foreign countries should have the whole nation behind them if it can be managed. That emphasises the importance of the proposal that there should be continuity of foreign policy so far as it can be arranged, *but, I hasten to add, as an absolute principle, without impairing in the slightest degree the responsibility of the Government of the day. That is a fundamental principle.*

In a speech at Leeds before the 1945 General Election, before there was any prospect of his being Foreign Minister, Mr Bevin said :

I cannot help feeling that on the question of defence, foreign policy and relations with other countries, there is an imperative necessity for the national will to be expressed and for a combination of effort in order to insure against any possible return of this tragedy through which we have passed. It may, of course, not be possible for the respective parties to agree, and then the Government of the day must take their own decision. But while no decision has been taken by the party on this matter, and I speak only for myself, I feel that our obligation to the citizens of this country and of other countries is such that a complete knowledge of the facts is essential both for the party in office and for the party in opposition ; and that it is necessary to secure, if possible, both continuity and combined effort in order to preserve peace throughout the world. I believe that irrespective of party we are all agreed that our prime duty is to hold the three great victorious Powers together to work with toleration and understanding in order that out of this business may come a strong, virile world organisation.

That really puts the whole matter in a nutshell. Mr Bevin's statement was strongly supported in the admirable address from which I have quoted above by Viscount Templewood.

It was of good augury, too, that Mr Attlee accepted Mr Churchill's invitation to accompany him to Potsdam as a friend and counsellor. His lead in doing so encourages the hope that action will follow. The new Government, I say, could make no greater contribution to Britain's prestige and influence than to follow up Mr Bevin's speech. It is a unique opportunity.

## 3

As to ways and means, there is a good deal of agreement among many of those who studied the subject closely that foreign policy should be dealt with in its wider, as distinct from its technical, aspects by the Committee of Imperial Defence or by some body analogous thereto. That proposal has been supported by the Earl of Perth, Viscount Templewood, the Liberal National Enquiry, Sir Walford Selby, Sir Victor Wellesley, who quotes the late Lord d'Abernon in support, and other high authorities.

The main issue is whether it should be the Committee of Imperial Defence or some other analogous body. There is nothing like leather, and I, having cobbled most of my life in the Committee of Imperial Defence, can give strong reasons for the Committee.

*First*, there is the intimate connection between foreign policy and defence as emphasised by Mr Bevin, and I think that point is enhanced by the endowment of the World Organisation with military attributes. In that fact you see how defence is linked up to policy.

*Second*, there is the Committee of Imperial Defence's prestige and experience.

*Third*, its advisory character and its well-understood procedure, which has been very highly tested in peace and war—because, in war, the Committee of Imperial Defence becomes the War Cabinet,

and the same machinery, adjusted to times of war, tuned up to work even faster than in peace, becomes the machinery of the supreme control.

*Fourth*, there are a number of precedents for the association of the leaders of the Opposition with the work of the Committee.

*Fifth*, there is the experienced Secretariat, which, for purposes of foreign policy, should, of course, be reinforced from the Foreign Office.

*Sixth* and last, but by no means least, the long association of the Dominions and India with the Committee.

On the fourth point just mentioned, I cited many examples in a debate in the House of Lords on 28th March 1944. Consultation between the Government and the Opposition leaders occurred at the time of Munich, as described in Lord Maugham's book on that crisis. In the case of national defence, it has been by no means unusual to invite leaders of the Opposition parties to the Committee of Imperial Defence. There was the case of Lord Balfour, who, when Leader of the Opposition in 1908, attended the Committee of Imperial Defence to discuss the invasion problem, and, again, after he had laid down the leadership, he became a member of a very important sub-committee which inquired into the same subject in 1913-14. In 1914-15 he became a member of the War Council which was a projection into the war of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Again, Mr Bonar Law, as Leader of the Opposition, and Lord Lansdowne attended a very important meeting of the War Council in March 1915, when agreement was reached, though it is rather interesting to recall that they had not been willing to attend regularly at the time of controversy over the Dardanelles and munitions problems. After 1918, Lord Haldane, at Lord Baldwin's request, retained the chairmanship of an important sub-committee, and after the fall of the Labour Government in 1924, he several times attended the Committee of Imperial Defence in that capacity.

Between the two wars, the question of the Channel Tunnel was

constantly cropping up and it became the custom to invite leaders of the Opposition to attend the Committee for those discussions. Before the Disarmament Conference of 1932, there were rather prolonged discussions attended by several representatives of each of the Opposition parties on the disarmament policy.

On the sixth point listed above, namely, the relations of the Dominions and India with the Committee, we admittedly bump up against a difficulty. The degree and form of the association of the Governments of some of the Dominions, for most understandable political reasons into which I need not enter, have varied from time to time, although for many years they have all been kept fully informed of the Committee's work. They have all, in practice, applied its recommendations, and on an average three of them have usually been represented by their High Commissioners or otherwise at the large majority of the meetings of the Committee.

Here, however, the flexibility of the Committee of Imperial Defence may come to our rescue. A great part of the detailed work of the Committee of Imperial Defence is always delegated to standing sub-committees, and on these even a Dominion which was at the time not regularly represented at meetings of the main Committee has sometimes accepted representation.

All needs, therefore, might be met by the establishment by the Committee of Imperial Defence of a Standing Sub-committee on Foreign Affairs. It would normally be presided over by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and would include the Secretaries of State for Dominion Affairs, the Colonies, India, War and Air, the First Lord of the Admiralty ; and representatives of the Opposition parties and of the Dominions to such extent as their Governments should decide. The Prime Minister, as president of the Committee of Imperial Defence, should be the *ex officio* president of the Standing Sub-committee on Foreign Affairs also, but the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be the working Chairman in order to carry out the perfectly correct principle, enunciated by Mr Wilson Harris at the Royal

Empire Society on 29th May 1945, that foreign policy must be carried out by the Foreign Secretary. This plan would give the Foreign Secretary at first hand the views of the Opposition and of the Dominions when he submitted his policy to the Cabinet, and the Dominions themselves, in deciding their foreign policy, would have the same advantage.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs would, in accordance with the ordinary practice of the Committee of Imperial Defence, set up its own standing or *ad hoc* sub-committees of permanent officials with Dominions representation. For instance, it is of great importance that the organisation should provide for the co-ordination of the policy of the various Government Departments concerned in economic matters, like the Treasury, or the Board of Trade, and other Departments whose affairs may at the time have a bearing on foreign affairs. There is no doubt that some of our troubles between the 1914 and 1939 wars resulted from the effects of independent Departmental action in such matters as reparations from Germany, lending money to Germany, and so forth.

To assist in that aspect, then, I would advocate that the standing high-level Committee on Foreign Affairs should have the assistance of an Economic Sub-committee composed of senior civil servants, with Dominions representation. I think also a Sub-committee on Co-ordination of Departmental Publicity might be valuable. Full use should be made, of course, of the existing sub-committees of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Some of Sir Victor Wellesley's proposals in his book *Diplomacy in Fetters* might be useful in preparing material for this organisation, though they would be working under, and primarily for, the Foreign Office. And, for the purposes of the Standing Foreign Affairs Sub-committee, the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence should be reinforced by representatives of the Foreign Office, and perhaps the Dominions Office, and of the Dominions to such an extent as they themselves should

desire. The Indian General Staff has always been represented on the secretariat.

The whole organisation, like the Committee of Imperial Defence itself, would be advisory and consultative, reporting to the Committee of Imperial Defence and to the Empire Governments.

If that particular plan should not commend itself to the leaders of the Opposition and/or to the Dominions, we should have to fall back on a separate but similar organisation which would have to keep in close touch with the Committee of Imperial Defence because of the connection between defence and foreign policy : for the British Commonwealth must not be allowed to break down on a mere matter of machinery or nomenclature. That alternative plan, although a second-best, would be quite workable administratively and would be preferable to an organisation which did not include all the Dominions, for, as Viscount Bennett has put it : "There must be unity or there will be disaster."

A supplementary proposal that has been canvassed is a Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, or, as I should prefer, on External Affairs as a whole. It is argued for that plan that it would be of some value in removing misgivings amongst the rank and file of the Opposition parties about the special information given to their leaders, and it is claimed that it would result in keeping Parliament better informed than at present. But a good deal is already done informally, *ad hoc*, and the informal method has advantages. There were frequent examples during the 1939-45 war of Members of Parliament of all parties being addressed by Ministers. The tendency of the Opposition parties to organise their work by setting up committees of their own members should help Opposition leaders in this process of informal education. But there really are considerable objections to the plan of a formal Standing Parliamentary Committee. It would put an almost unendurable strain on the Ministers and

staff of a Department already much overworked, and it would constantly put Ministers in the dilemma of having to choose between giving an incomplete account of events, and taking the risk of giving rather widespread knowledge on vital secrets. It is a terrible dilemma. A Minister must be able to tell the truth if he talks to a body like that, but if he tells the truth he does spread secrets too widely ; and, as stated in the admirable Liberal pamphlet on *Problems of Foreign Policy*, "experience of the effectiveness of all such committees abroad is not encouraging as an example to follow." On the whole, therefore, I sum up against it.

If I may descend for a moment from big things to apparently small things—*apparently* small—I should like to put in a plea for the tuning up of details of administration on the lower levels in order to avoid risk of delays. If we had any success in the Committee of Imperial Defence and the War Cabinet systems of the two wars, it is because we worked on the principle that time, even minutes of time, count. The rule was that conclusions and decisions of Cabinets and committees had to be completed and circulated the same day—not three weeks later, as was only too common in some Departments, and I expect is not unknown to-day. All documents had to be properly numbered, dated, paged, paragraphed and signed—points on which Mr Ramsay MacDonald was a very great stickler. Action had always to be followed up. A system of "chasing" was adopted and is essential.

At present the inter-departmental machine, outside the highly efficient war machine, must to some extent be run down, owing to fatigue, huge war-expansion, dilution, retention of over-age personnel, and, above all, no recruitment of young personnel for six years. But I hope the opportunity of post-war reorganisation will be taken to tune the whole thing up, and especially inter-departmental communications, on the basis that time counts in peace almost as much as in war. You can never tell what is going to be lost by comparatively trivial delays.

I have referred to "epidemics of unreason" and our present isolation from currents of continental opinion. On this point Viscount Templewood in the Royal Empire Society address already mentioned made the interesting proposal that the Foreign Office should have a much more comprehensive organisation for keeping the public informed than in the past, in order to steady public opinion and check fits of emotion. But Mr Wilson Harris, who has had very exceptional experience on the Press side, deprecated too active an initiative on the part of the Foreign Office. He thought the present arrangement admirable. He said that the Press displayed a lively interest in foreign policy, that there was a competent news department at the Foreign Office, and that it was for the diplomatic correspondents of the papers to take that news and put their own interpretation on it.

My own impression was that the Foreign Office organisation between the wars was a pretty good compromise between the excessive secrecy of war-time, which was stricter in the recent war than even in 1914-18, and the tendentious, deliberately misleading, and even mischievous wrecking policy of certain foreign nations. It was a good compromise between those two.

I think the principles of secrecy and publicity were fairly stated in Chapter I which, while referring to conferences, was of more general application, and may be repeated here :

... at certain stages secrecy may be essential. It is, of course, equally essential that eventually there should be the fullest publicity. The representatives of nations are responsible to their respective peoples, and unless those peoples are properly instructed by the fullest publicity, they will not form a true judgment of the issues. Premature publicity, however, may be fatal. In war the lives of combatants and the success of operations may be sacrificed thereby. Even in peace the settlement of delicate international problems may sometimes be jeopardised by ill-timed publicity, as instanced by the failure of the Council of Ten in Paris. In these matters, those who

have to conduct the negotiations must have at least the same right of secrecy as is exercised by a Cabinet, a board of directors, or the executive committee of a trade union.

That was in 1920. I have had a good deal of experience since in international conferences. The principle we adopted was : " Give as much information as possible without causing a setback to the conference." The actual procedure evolved was that, after a careful overhaul of the situation on the previous evening, I used to see the Press Officer of the delegation at an early hour in the morning, and discuss with him what ought not to be said to correspondents, what could usefully be said, and what could be said " off the record," for guidance. After each meeting of the conference I saw the Press Officer again, just to check up as to the effect of what had happened on our understanding. Of course, we constantly sought ministerial guidance, and in moments of crisis or in long conferences we asked the Ministers to see the Press themselves and answer their questions. In early days, Lord Riddell, and in later days those trusty and experienced experts Sir Arthur Willert of the Foreign Office and Mr. George Steward of 10 Downing Street, operated this system with the greatest success.

I never went into the lions' den of the Press myself, because I had to keep myself for the megatheria. I knew myself so well that I did not trust myself not to make a slip, bearing in mind Bacon's aphorism :

" They will so beset a man with questions, and draw him on, and pick it out of him, that, without an absurd silence, he must show an inclination one way ; or, if he do not, they will gather as much by his silence as by his speech."

That is why I did not go in myself. However, I am pretty certain Sir Arthur would agree, that if the Press are treated fairly and given reasons for withholding information, they are to be trusted to play the game. I suppose if I were to say we were never let down, you would ask in chorus : " What, never ? " and I should reply in Gilbert's words, " Hardly ever."

All that may be to the good, but my own belief is that as yet the vast mass of our people will only with great difficulty be induced to think very much about foreign policy, however far the Foreign Office and the Press may spread themselves. In ordinary times they are more interested in racing, football, cricket, dog-racing, Irish sweeps and betting—God bless them ! That is really why the pacifists got away with it between the wars. The people thought there would be no more wars because nobody wished to rearm. The people quite erroneously thought all other nations were going to share our views. To avoid taxation and self-sacrifice, and to receive the benefits of all kinds of social services and pensions and what-not was much more comfortable than heavy taxation and compulsory military service. Our unilateral attempt to anticipate the millennium brought us pretty near to disaster, and, unless our people get better instructed in foreign policy and its relation to defence, and unless we are more vigilant than ever in our history, it will all come again. It is beginning already with the usual talk that another war will destroy civilisation. If we are once more caught unprepared one day, a deluge of rockets and atomic bombs, steered by radar, will catch us unprepared. We shall be rendered defenceless and invaded in real earnest, for you must invade a country to occupy it. And a very different type of civilisation will take our place, if we do not watch out.

We must, above all, avoid the mistake of premature disarmament by precept and example, while straining every effort to make the World Organisation a success.

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